

***The early impact of the Secondary School Places
Allocation reform in Hong Kong:***

A study of school choice

BY

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

2008



Table of Contents

DECLARATION.....	III
PREFACE.....	IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	VI
ABSTRACT.....	VII
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
ABBREVIATIONS.....	XII
 CHAPTER 1 THE HONG KONG CONTEXT.....	 1
1.1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2. EXPANSION AND AVAILABILITY OF SECONDARY EDUCATION HISTORICALLY	2
1.3. HONG KONG SOCIETY AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM	15
1.4. CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION POLICY MAKING.....	19
1.5. GOVERNANCE, FUNDING, TEACHING STAFF RECRUITMENT AND SALARY.....	22
1.6. EDUCATION EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET CUT	24
1.7. DECLINING BIRTH RATE, DECREASING ENROLMENT AND NEW SCHOOLS.....	25
1.8. A SUMMARY	28
 CHAPTER 2 SECONDARY SCHOOL CHOICE AND REFORMS IN HONG KONG.....	 30
2.1. INTRODUCTION.....	30
2.2. REASONS FOR THE REFORMS	30
2.3. SECONDARY SCHOOL CHOICE---1962-1978	39
2.4. SECONDARY SCHOOL CHOICE---1978-2001	41
2.5. SSPA REFORM AND ITS RATIONALE IN 2001.....	43
2.6. TYPES OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS, CURRICULUM, POPULARITY AND TUITION FEE	54
2.7. DEMAND AND SUPPLY: SECONDARY SCHOOL MARKET SITUATION IN HONG KONG.....	56
 CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW OF QUASI MARKET POLICIES AND SCHOOL CHOICE.....	 61
3.1. INTRODUCTION.....	61
3.2. CONCEPT OF QUASI-MARKET AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE HONG KONG CASE	62
3.3. DEVELOPMENT OF QUASI MARKET AND PRIVATISATION TREND IN EDUCATION IN H.K.....	67
3.4. THE DEBATE: BENEFIT AND PROBLEMS OF CHOICE	71
 CHAPTER 4 RESEARCHING THE EARLY IMPACT OF THE SSPA.....	 86
4.1. INTRODUCTION.....	86
4.2. RESEARCH QUESTION, FOCUS AND AIMS OF ENQUIRY.....	87
4.3. METHODOLOGY AND JUSTIFICATION	88
4.4. SAMPLING, RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS CONSTRUCTED AND USED.....	93
4.5. MY EMPIRICAL STORY, PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND QUALITY OF THE DATA	97
4.6. LIMITATIONS AND ISSUES OF VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY.....	111
 CHAPTER 5 PARENTAL CHOICE IN HONG KONG.....	 116
5.1. INTRODUCTION.....	116
5.2. PARENTAL PREFERENCE, CHOICE AVAILABILITY AND VERTICAL COMPETITION	117
5.3. CHOICE RESULTS AND EXPERIENCE OF DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PARENTS.....	130
5.4. INFORMED CHOICE: SUCCESS AND INFORMATION.....	139
5.5. CHOICE BARRIER/DP PARTICIPATION AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES.....	154

5.6. DP SUCCESS, SCHOOL SELECTION AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES.....	157
5.7. SKILLS, ABILITY AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES.....	161
5.8. APPEAL MECHANISM, PARTICIPATION AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES.....	169
5.9. END PRODUCTS, PERCEIVED SATISFACTION AND BARRIER TO CHANGE SCHOOLS.....	175
CHAPTER 6 SCHOOL IN THE MARKET PLACE.....	179
6.1. INTRODUCTION.....	179
6.2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUR CASE STUDY SCHOOLS.....	179
6.3. AN ACCOUNT OF THE INTERVIEWS DATA AND TREATMENT	186
6.4. IMPROVING SCHOOL IMAGE AND INCREASING PUBLICITY ACTIVITIES.....	187
6.5. CHANGES IN STUDENT RECRUITMENT IN THE FOUR CASE STUDY SCHOOLS	193
6.6. TRIANGULATION: SELECTION CRITERIA OF OTHER SCHOOLS	198
6.7. CHANGES IN INTAKE SIZE	203
6.8. SCHOOL ENROLMENT SOCIAL COMPOSITION AND THE ISSUE OF EQUALITY.....	207
CHAPTER 7 ATTITUDE TOWARD THE SSPA AND QUASI-MARKET REFORMS	211
7.1. INTRODUCTION.....	211
7.2. INDIVIDUAL CHOICE AND SCHOOL SELECTION—VIEWS TOWARD INCREASE OF DP SCHOOLS AND DP PLACES.....	212
7.3. A TTITUDE TOWARD STREAMING —VIEWS TOWARD ABOLITION OF TESTS.....	214
7.4. ATTITUDE TOWARD ELITISM AND COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION—VIEWS TOWARDS CUTTING OF BANDS AND MIXED ABILITY	217
7.5. OVERALL COMMENTS OF THE SSPA AND THE QUASI-MARKET REFORMS.....	222
7.6. SUMMARY OF VIEWS OF EDUCATORS AND PARENTS.....	229
CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	231
8.1. INTRODUCTION.....	231
8.2. PARENTAL CHOICE SITUATION-DEMAND AND COMPETITION.....	232
8.3. INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES: WINNERS AND LOSERS.....	235
8.4. PARENTS' KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARD THE REFORM	239
8.5. SCHOOLS' STRATEGIES IN RESPONSE TO THE NEW SSPA	240
8.6. EARLY IMPACT ON SCHOOLS' INTAKE SIZE AND INTAKE SOCIAL COMPOSITION.....	241
8.7. EDUCATORS' KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARD THE REFORM.....	243
8.8. IMPLICATIONS.....	245
8.9. CONCLUSION.....	251
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	253
APPENDIX A SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES ALLOCATION (SSPA) 1999-2001.....	268
APPENDIX B1 LETTER OF INVITATION TO ALL THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN HONG KONG TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PARENTAL CHOICE PROJECT	273
APPENDIX B2 LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARENTS, THE PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEW CONSENT FORMS (CHINESE VERSION).....	276
APPENDIX B3 LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARENTS, THE PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEW CONSENT FORMS (ENGLISH VERSION).....	293
APPENDIX C1 TELEPHONE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE PARENTS	311
APPENDIX C2 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE TWO POLICY MAKERS	315
APPENDIX C3 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE TWO POLICY MAKERS	317

Declaration

I hereby declare that I have composed this thesis and that the work
contained herein is my own.

Mei-siu Chan

25 March 2008

Preface

Recent educational reforms in Hong Kong emphasise the increase of choice, chance, diversity, equality of opportunity and quality of education for everyone in education. It is claimed that the present reform policies which encourage 'pak fa chai fong' (Let hundreds of flowers bloom at the same time) can provide more choice, more diversity and increase consumer power. It also claims that under the reform policy, the provider can be free from the control of the government and have the autonomy to create a first class, quality education in the 21st century for students in Hong Kong. As secondary schooling affects one's future life chances and educational opportunities, the kind of arrangements made for secondary schooling, in terms of policy and its impact on both suppliers and consumers, become important issues.

The researcher comes from a working class background and majored in sociology at college. She has taught in both primary and secondary education in Hong Kong for a period of 8 years. During her postgraduate years in Edinburgh University, she benefited from enlightening lectures and from the input of experienced supervisors. As a parent of three children who receive their education in the West (i.e. Edinburgh and California), the researcher is interested in and curious about the relationship between education, society, economy, culture and politics. In particular, she is interested in the equality issue of the secondary school choice policy and its related consequences.

As already mentioned, the main concern of the present research is equality of opportunities. The advocates of the policy claim that more choice is good because it is 'classless' and fairer than planned provision (Chubb & Moe 1990). Everyone has the chance to choose and to decide upon the best providers of goods and services to meet their needs. In Gewirtz, et al's (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe 1995) research on 'parental choice', they argue that these choices may have 'class bias'. Social and cultural capitals may play an important role in choice-making and so they conclude that: first, choice is very directly and powerfully related to social-class differences;

second, 'choice emerges as a major new factor in maintaining and indeed reinforcing social-class divisions and inequalities' (ibid: 55).

All such literature concerning equality issues of school choice prompts the question: what are the main effects regarding the new school choice policy implemented in Hong Kong in 2001? The focus of this research is, therefore, to investigate the early impact of the new school choice policy in Hong Kong. My aim in this research is to provide readers with a chance to understand the early impact of the policy on different stakeholders, mainly, parents and schools through the provision of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

In this thesis, I have employed multi-methods, which include case study, survey (questionnaire) and interview as my research strategy in order to investigate the new secondary school choice situation in Hong Kong. I examined how parents engaged in choosing schools and what effect the subsequent consequences of the policy, namely, the early impact on the key stakeholders - consumers and providers.

The framework of this thesis starts with chapter 1 and covers the local context in Hong Kong. Chapter 2 provides a detailed account of the Secondary School Places' Allocation Policy (SSPA) reform. Chapter 3 contains a literature review of quasi-market and school choice policy. It also provides a historical development of quasi market policies in education in Hong Kong. In Chapter 4, I present my main research question and research sub-questions, my research design, its justification, my account of how I carried it out and its limitations. Chapters 5-7 contain the empirical data on both the demand side and the supply side. Chapter 8 features a discussion and conclusion of the early impact of the policy on the key stake-holders: parents and schools.

Acknowledgements

In completing this dissertation, no words can express the depth of gratitude I owe to my supervisors of study, Professor David Raffé, Mrs. Janet Draper and Dr. Donn. They gave me the best of guidance, advice, encouragement and support throughout my period of study. They asked critical questions, sharpened my sense of direction, and reminded me of the importance of objectivity in my findings and conclusion. All their suggestions lifted my level of understanding and knowledge and helped direct me in the writing of this thesis. Furthermore, I realise they have been more than mere supervisors, as they have always been supportive, especially in their understanding and help which relieved me of the anxiety of having to research at the critical time when I broke my ankle. Their continued support was also evident in the period after my mother-in-law's funeral in Hong Kong and when my father passed away in Hong Kong. Their understanding was also appreciated when our whole family moved from Edinburgh to California, and when my husband got Rheumatoid Arthritis in 2006. I am so grateful to their understanding that helped relieve much of my pressure and burden.

This dissertation could also not have been completed without the support of my husband. He is the one who encouraged me initially to start my PhD study and who continued to encourage me during times of difficulty. My three sons played an inspiring role too. They have brought fun, joy and warmth to my life.

I must thank my brother, PM and my sister, Helen. They supported me financially and emotionally throughout my PhD study. Furthermore, they helped to provide me with books, policy documents, newspapers...etc from Hong Kong and helped to deliver and collect the parental questionnaires to and from schools when I was immobile due to my broken ankle. I would also like to express my appreciation to my Christians friends in Hong Kong, to those in the Chinese Evangelical Church in Edinburgh and those in the Glasgow Chinese Christian Church who supported me and helped with the translation, pilot studies and construction of all the research instruments. I must also thank Wai Ho and Hung Yee Leung, who helped to send 'Letters of Invitation to research' to all the secondary schools in Hong Kong. I would also like to thank Amy Chow who helped to make contact with the four case study schools before I went back to Hong Kong to continue my research.

Finally, I thank God for His providence in my study.

Abstract

Recent educational reforms in Hong Kong aimed to increase choice, diversity and quality of education for everyone. The advocates of school-choice policies claim that more choice is good because it is 'classless' and fairer than planned provision (Chubb & Moe 1990). Everyone has the chance to choose and to decide upon the best providers of goods and services to meet their needs. However, opponents (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe 1995) argue that social and cultural capital may play an important role in choice-making. They conclude that choice is very directly and powerfully related to social-class, and that 'choice emerges as a major new factor in maintaining and indeed reinforcing social-class divisions and inequalities' (ibid: 55). All such literature prompts the question: what are the main effects of the new school choice policy implemented in Hong Kong in 2001? The focus of this research is, therefore, to investigate the early impact of the new school choice policy in Hong Kong and the reactions of parents and schools. In this thesis, I have employed a multi-method research strategy which includes case studies of four schools, a questionnaire survey of 905 parents and interviews with parents, school managers and policy-makers in order to investigate the early impact of the new secondary school choice (SSPA) policy in Hong Kong. I examined how parents engaged in choosing schools and the subsequent consequences of the policy for the key stakeholders - consumers and providers. The richness of the data reveals the equality issues inherent in the choice process in the unique choice situation in Hong Kong.

List of tables

Chapter 1

Table 1.1.	Important time-line of development of junior secondary education and SSPA reform historically
Table 1.2.	Hong Kong education and society
Table 1.3.	Providers of Primary and Secondary Schooling in Hong Kong 1998
Table 1.4.	Public Expenditure on Education as a percentage of total Public Expenditure
Table 1.5.	Enrolment in Primary Day schools (with different modes of subsidy)
Table 1.6.	Enrolment in Secondary Day schools (with different modes of subsidy)
Table 1.7.	Student enrolment (Full/Day time): 1998/9-2004/5

Chapter 2

Table 2.1.	Economic production Ratio (%) 1980-1997
Table 2.2.	Detailed changes of the SSPA during the transition period 2001-5 and the future reform agenda
Table 2.3.	The two stages of the SSPA (Secondary School Places Allocation: DP & CA) in 2001
Table 2.4.	The proposed Post-transition SSPA Mechanism (EC, Review of MOI & SSPA 2005: 36-43)
Table 2.5.	Example of allocation by Net, by Band and By Parental Choice in school Net X
Table 2.6.	Survey of out-flow rate of Hong Kong schools
Table 2.7.	Average class size in July and in EMI and CMI in September (1998-2002)
Table 2.8.	Out-flow rate and class size in different kinds of schools (mode of subsidies) in 2002
Table 2.9.	Out-flow rate of different bands of schools in 2002

Chapter 4

Table 4.1.	Aspects of the education market and researching
Table 4.2.	Research phases, time, research methods, data sources and aims
Table 4.3.	Our Sampling: Eleven schools from eleven school nets in Hong Kong
Table 4.4.	Identity of the respondents
Table 4.5.	Education level of Respondents

Table 4.6.	Education level of Respondent's partner
Table 4.7.	Respondent's household (aggregate) education level
Table 4.8.	Characteristics of the 12 respondents from the four case study schools

Chapter 5

Table 5.1.	The most important factor in choosing a DP school and in ranking CA schools (answers to the two open questions with frequencies & %)
Table 5.2.	Pick five most important factors in the choice of DP and CA schools (closed question with picked frequencies and %)
Table 5.3.	Rank the five most important factors in the choice of DP and CA schools (with rank frequency, mean and mode)
Table 5.4.	Naming each factor as important, by parental educational level
Table 5.5.	Whether chosen DP school was inside/outside local school net, by parental educational level
Table 5.6.	Present school inside or outside local school net by parental educational level
Table 5.7.	Choosing co-education or single-sex as an important factor for Hong Kong parents
Table 5.8.	The most Important factor by child gender (open question)
Table 5.9.	Picked five most Important factors by child gender (closed question)
Table 5.10.	Choose DP school locally or not by child gender
Table 5.11.	Present school outside or inside local school net by child gender
Table 5.12.	Comparison of national figure and our survey
Table 5.13.	Choice outcome by child gender
Table 5.14.	Present school place by child gender
Table 5.15.	Acceptance of school place by child gender
Table 5.16.	First three choices & residual allocation by parental education level (simplified version)
Table 5.17.	School choices by parental education levels
Table 5.18.	Accept the allocated school by parental education level
Table 5.19.	Banding of respondent child (information from primary school provided by our respondents) and the banding of child's present schools by parental education level
Table 5.20.	Important sources of information in SSPA (both DP and CA)
Table 5.21.	Types, sources and contents of printed material given to P.6 parents by the primary school:
Table 5.22.	Number of Parents' Meetings and Contents of meetings in primary schools generally
Table 5.23.	Satisfaction with primary school advice on ranking
Table 5.24.	Reasons for satisfaction with primary school advice on ranking

Table 5.25.	Satisfaction of primary advice on ranking by choices of allocated school
Table 5.26.	Satisfaction of Primary school advice on ranking by acceptance of allocated school
Table 5.27.	Satisfaction of Primary school advice on ranking by parental education level
Table 5.28.	Primary school advice satisfaction by child gender
Table 5.29.	Known selection criteria of DP
Table 5.30.	Source of DP secondary school selection criteria
Table 5.31.	School place by parental education level
Table 5.32.	DP application/participation by parental education level
Table 5.33.	DP participation by child gender
Table 5.34.	DP Success by known criteria or not
Table 5.35.	Known Criteria by happy with DP result
Table 5.36.	Known criteria by parental education level
Table 5.37.	DP success by child gender
Table 5.38.	DP result happy or not by child gender
Table 5.39.	Rank different by parental education level (CA)
Table 5.40.	Choose same by parental education level (DP)
Table 5.41.	Opinion of fairness of the scaling system of ranking students into different bands by parental education level
Table 5.42.	Explanation of fair or not by parental education level
Table 5.43.	Comment on reduction of 5 bands into 3 by parental education level
Table 5.44.	Explanation of parents' comments on reduction of 5 bands into 3 by parental education level
Table 5.45.	Rank differently by child gender
Table 5.46.	Choose same or not by child gender
Table 5.47.	Fair or not by child gender
Table 5.48.	Appeal cases in 2001 by child gender
Table 5.49.	Appeal participation by parental education level (simplified version)
Table 5.50.	Appeal outcome by parental education level
Table 5.51.	Appeal participation/reasons by child gender
Table 5.52.	Appeal outcome by child gender
Table 5.53.	Present school place by parental satisfaction
Table 5.54.	Explanation of change school or not by parental educational level

Chapter 6

Table 6.1.	General characteristics of the four aided case study schools in 2001-2
Table 6.2.	Parental education of the respondents of the four schools in the 2001 survey

Table 6.3.	Leadership style and attitude of the four case-study schools
Table 6.4.	Discretionary places by DP applications in the four schools
Table 6.5.	Selection criteria of DP applications in 2003 in EMI1 and EMI2
Table 6.6.	Enrolment size in 2003 from Form I to Form III of the four case study schools
Table 6.7.	Enrolment social characteristics (100% textbook allowance-data collected in February-March in 2003)
Table 6.8.	Enrolment social characteristics (outside private musical lessons & others—musical instrument learn inside schools)

Chapter 7

Table 7.1.	Explanation of parents' comments on increase of DP places from 10% to 20%
Table 7.2.	Explanation of parents' comments on increase of one more DP school
Table 7.3.	Parents' comments on the abolition of tests
Table 7.4.	Explanation of parents' comments on abolition of test
Table 7.5.	Parents' comments on cutting 5 bands to 3
Table 7.6.	Explanation of parents' comments on the cutting of bands from 5 to 3
Table 7.7.	Parents' comments on the old and new systems (Q2.12)
Table 7.8.	Explanation of parents' comments on the old and new systems

Abbreviations

<i>AAT</i>	<i>Academic Aptitude Test (A test which was used to scale students' internal school performance and stream them into different bands)</i>
	<i>Basic Competence Assessment</i>
<i>BCA</i>	<i>Basic Competence Assessment</i>
<i>BPS</i>	<i>Bought Place Schemes</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Central Computer Allocation</i>
<i>CMI</i>	<i>Chinese as Medium of Instruction</i>
<i>DP</i>	<i>Discretionary Places</i>
<i>DSS</i>	<i>Direct Subside Scheme</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>Education Commission</i>
<i>ED</i>	<i>Education Department</i>
<i>EMB</i>	<i>Education & Manpower Bureau</i>
<i>EMI</i>	<i>English as Medium of Instruction</i>
<i>EOC</i>	<i>Equal Opportunity Commission</i>
<i>FNSS</i>	<i>Feeder and Nominated School System</i>
<i>HK</i>	<i>Hong Kong</i>
<i>HKALE</i>	<i>Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination</i>
<i>HKCEE</i>	<i>Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination</i>
<i>HKSAR Government</i>	<i>Hong Kong Special Administration Region Government</i>
<i>MOI</i>	<i>Medium of Instruction</i>
<i>MTR</i>	<i>Mass Transit Railway</i>
<i>OOG</i>	<i>One-off Grant</i>
<i>P1</i>	<i>Primary 1</i>
<i>PTU</i>	<i>Professional Teacher Union</i>
<i>R & E</i>	<i>Remedial and Enhancement policy, (A policy to help the slow learners and enhance the rate of development of those more gifted)</i>
<i>PIS</i>	<i>Private Independent Schools</i>
<i>S1</i>	<i>Secondary 1</i>
<i>SMI</i>	<i>Self Management Initiative</i>
<i>SSEE</i>	<i>Secondary School Entrance Examination</i>

Chapter 1 The Hong Kong Context

1.1. Introduction

The world is undergoing unprecedented changes, and Hong Kong is no exception. We are seeing substantial changes in the economic structure and the knowledge-based economy is here to stay. Hong Kong is also facing tremendous challenges posed by a globalised economy. Politically, reunification with China and democratisation have changed the ways Hong Kong people think and live...In time of changes, everyone has to meet new challenges. Adaptability, creativity and abilities for communication, self-learning and co-operation are now the prerequisites for anyone to succeed...Nevertheless, we must address the inadequacies within the existing education system to enable the majority of Hong Kong people to achieve lifelong learning and all-round education...(Education Commission: Education Blueprint for the 21st Century, 2000: 3).

The above sentences in the Education Reform Proposal of 2000 stated that the world is changing and that we need to change to meet the new challenges posed by a global economy. The Proposal set the stage for tremendous education reforms in Hong Kong. The reform measures include reforms in the academic structure, the curricula, the assessment mechanism and the interface between different stages of education. In this chapter, I aim to provide the reader with information on the local context behind the reforms.

The framework of this chapter thus includes: five historical characteristics of differentiated secondary education opportunities in Hong Kong education; development/expansion of the Hong Kong public education system and important time lines of the Secondary School Choice Reforms in section 1.2; Hong Kong

society and the education system in section 1.3; contemporary education policy making in 1.4; governance, funding, teaching staff recruitment and salary in section 1.5; education expenditure and budget cut in 1.6; and decreasing student population, enrolment and the disputes over school closures and new schools in section 1.7. Finally, a brief summary of this chapter will be in section 1.8.

1.2. Expansion and availability of secondary education historically

Before I further engage the discussion on the Secondary School Place Allocation Policy (SSPA) reform historically, it would be useful at this stage to inform the reader of five historical characteristics of differentiated secondary education opportunities; the development/expansion of the Hong Kong public education system and important time lines of the Secondary School Choice Reforms.

The characteristics of Hong Kong secondary education will be discussed under the following headings: language as cultural capital, the organisation of selection, the unequal quality of education, the notion of equity and finally, social stratification.

Firstly: language as cultural capital. Postiglione observed that English as cultural capital and the support of elite schools was the policy and practice adopted by the colonial Hong Kong British government with regard to the recruitment of civil servants for a long time. This also led to the creation of a large Anglo-Chinese system of secondary schools, as described below by Postiglione:

By gearing up to teach English-language courses that encourage success on linguistically based civil service examinations, educational changes have been increasingly fashioned to dovetail with the recruitment of native Hong Kongese to the civil service. This has been accomplished through a policy process that reflects the colonial support for elite

schools and the preservation of the University of Hong Kong as a wholly English-medium institution. English-language facility and cultural consonance are essential for the recruitment and promotion of graduates from the University of Hong Kong in the civil service...this emphasis also led to the creation of a large Anglo-Chinese system of secondary schools'(Postiglione 1992:21).

In 1999, Bray & Koo (1999: 53) also noted that 'An enduring debate in Hong Kong concerns the Medium of Instruction (MOI) for schooling. A twin-track system emerged historically, with secondary schools which used English as the medium of instruction (EMI) enjoying a higher status than their Chinese medium (CMI) counterparts'. They also noted that though most primary schools in Hong Kong are CMI, parents often favour those that achieve good results in English and seek access to prestigious secondary schools.

From Bray and Koo (2004:225)'s description, the reader knows the extent to which Hong Kong parents favoured English and these forces brought a shift in the medium of instruction in secondary schools during the period 1960-1990. However, Bray and Koo stated that, in reality, many students were unable to cope with a curriculum taught fully in English and therefore many such schools taught in mixed code, which resulted in students having insufficient command or literacy in either English or Chinese:

Concerning secondary education, among the ironies of the 1980s and 1990s was that the colonial authorities were keen to emphasise Chinese in the school system but found that families were more interested in English...many families favoured English, first because school leavers who were fluent in the language were perceived to have an edge over their competitors in the labour market, and second because English fluency gave more opportunities for post-secondary studies. These forces brought a shift in the medium of instruction in secondary schools. Whereas in 1960s, 57.9% of pupils were in schools that claimed to teach in English, by 1980 the proportion was 87.7% and by 1990 it had reached 91.7%... In reality, however, many such schools taught in mixed code since their pupils were unable to cope with a curriculum taught fully in English.

Bray and Koo (2004:225) further noted that both the colonial and post-colonial government tried to change the situation and claimed that the MOI policy was introduced for educational reasons, but it was widely perceived as being primarily driven by political motives (Lai & Byram, 2003:315). Whether it was for educational purposes or political motives, one thing for certain is that most parents would generally favour EMI over CMI, regardless of their child's language ability.

One example illustrates this market force quite well. In the late 1980s one school changed to the use of Chinese as their medium of instruction with the educational purpose of improving the quality of students' learning and of teaching. Three years later the school was forced to reverse its policy as the 'quality' of the student intake was perceived to have dropped, simply because parents of higher achievers were unwilling to send their children to a CMI school (Morris 1997).

Bray & Koo (1999) stated that various policies were employed in the 1990s: at first, schools were permitted to teach in either medium according to their resources and capabilities and various programmes were established to assist students to move from CMI primary schools to EMI secondary schools. In 1997, the post-colonial government took a firm stand and designated 100 secondary schools as EMI schools. As already mentioned, parents favoured EMI schools as EMI schools were perceived as having a higher status than CMI schools. The fear of a drop in status was thus created in relation to CMI education among some of those who were omitted from the list. On appeal, 14 more schools were added to the list of 100 schools, which are now regarded as being capable of delivering EMI education.

Bray & Koo (1999: 53) noted that 'At the heart of the issue is the tension between the post-colonial government's determination to promote trilingualism (three languages: Cantonese, Mandarin and English) and biliteracy (English & Chinese)'. Furthermore, whole-person education was considered by the government (Hong Kong Government Circular 1997) to be best fostered in most cases through the mother tongue.

However, the language policy which was widely seen as a restoration of 'mother tongue education', argued by Choi (2003) was, in fact, an elitist language selection policy. Choi stated that the policy, which provided for the selection of the best primary school graduates to monolingual education in English in secondary schools, was designed to be a cost-effective way of training English skills for those who had the economic and cultural capital to benefit from it.

Hong Kong parents have known for a long time the social, academic and economic benefits that competence in English can bring and thus desire EMI education for their offspring (Bray & Koo 1999). English as cultural capital has had such a long history in Hong Kong. In addition, it is now a world language as regards changes in ICT (Information & Communication Technology) and so has become a dominant factor in parents' thinking on school choice in Hong Kong (Lai & Byram 2003).

Secondly: the organisation of selection in Hong Kong from a historical viewpoint. Education in Hong Kong followed a colonial pattern in its early colonial period, with a few schools established specifically for the children of expatriates. After the

Second World War, the Hong Kong school system was gradually designed to serve the needs of the local population (Postiglione 1991).

In 1978, Hong Kong started to provide a nine-year universal, free and compulsory education. However, culturally and historically, the Chinese pay a high regard to education and look on it as the way to social mobility. An increasing number of the student population chose to study beyond the nine years of free, compulsory education. By 1980, 87% of the student population studied beyond the nine years (from Secondary 4 onward) of free compulsory education, although the government only managed to provide 40% of them with places in the public sector (government or aided schools) while applying the minimum tuition fees. Those who can afford and choose to continue their education beyond nine years (from Secondary 4 onward) but who were not selected in the public sector then had to pay a higher fee in the self-financing private schools.

Quantitatively, as there was more demand than supply of school places in the public sector, selection was unavoidable. However, the character of the school selection process in Hong Kong was at that time described by Postiglione as being 'brutal'. In fact, less than 8 % survived to enter post-secondary and university-level education in Hong Kong in that period (Postiglione 1991: 24).

Due to the use of the 'Code of Aid' strategy to absorb the privately run 'enterprises' into an expanded 'aided' public sector, the number of private schools went into a continual decline. Postiglione (1991:25) noted that in the 1980s Hong Kong was heading in the opposite direction, while in the same period, many countries moved

toward the privatisation of education. He also noted that private school places in Hong Kong were generally 'inferior' to those in the government sector. In fact, historically, the most popular and prestigious schools are in the public sector, not in the private sector. This again is very different from private school places in other countries.

Thirdly: the unequal quality of education in Hong Kong from a historical perspective. Qualitatively, the government streams both the schools and the students according to their academic achievement. Public examination was the strategy adopted by the government to stream, select students and allocate them to different schools with different academic educational qualities. However, the quality of schools in Hong Kong varies greatly. One can see clearly the link between the educational background of parents and the quality of education their children had (Postiglione 1991:24):

There are striking variations indeed. Hong Kong has some of the best schools in the world in terms of student attainment... most of the schools however, leave something to be desired. Facilities, teacher qualifications, examination results and other indicators of quality rank low. Students are allocated to these schools for various reasons, including their test performance and lack of opportunity owing to the educational and economic status of their parents.

Tse (1998) commented that solely to provide educational opportunities is not enough. There is too much neglect under the system, while there is a great disparity in the education resources and quality of education that different primary and secondary schools offer to their students. In secondary education, he noted that there are obvious differences in the quality of education offered by schools with different

modes of funding, with syllabus differences and with different mediums of instruction.

Tse (1998) also noticed that the general quality of education in the public sector is better than in the private sector. Grammar schools are better than vocational schools, while EMI schools are better than those in the CMI. Furthermore, he stated that we could not neglect the inequality inherent in the popular prestigious schools and the various hidden inequalities within the system.

Obviously, from the above data, family social background and school characteristics (the quality of education it offers to students) interweave together to affect student achievement and, therefore, also affect their future life opportunities.

The fourth issue concerns equality of access to quality secondary education, which affects students' future life chances and their social mobility. This issue has become acute and generates so much debate, particularly so in Hong Kong's case. Sensicle (1992 :66) noted that:

Education is one of the leading issues in Hong Kong and generates passion and debate. The people of Hong Kong consider that education is the most reliable path to a successful career, and almost all parents are ambitious for their children to have the best education available. Degree level education is most parents' goal for their children and this reflects attitudes which give rise to some of the characteristics of Hong Kong people which may seem remarkable to visitors from the West. These include singlemindedness, diligence, a tendency not to question and to learn by rote.

Many have argued that education credentials are crucial in attaining social mobility in Asian countries (Lo 1984; Lee 1991). There is a long tradition which originated from ancient China's Sung Dynasty whereby scholars from very poor families could

always change their status by achievement in the civil examination conducted in the imperial court (Cheng 1994). Cheng (1997) noted that in China, examinations have gained a firm legitimacy as a reliable means of facilitating and regulating social mobility and this, for centuries, has given hope to millions of families. He further stated that though extremely few have fulfilled such a hope, public examinations have successfully pacified the underprivileged masses who would otherwise have resorted to revolution. This hope and belief still prevails although nowadays many other factors influence productivity and earnings in the global market.

Historically and culturally, Hong Kong Chinese parents still regard education as a channel to social mobility (Cheng 1997) and regard the type of secondary schooling as having a tremendously significant effect on their children's future. Besides, if their children do not perform well and only gain entry to an unpopular school (Lee 1996), they will lose face. This explains why Hong Kong parents have become so emotionally concerned with the SSPA allocation process, of which further mention will be made in the chapter on findings later.

Furthermore, in 1998, Tse (1998:101-2) commented that though most people in Hong Kong can enjoy a 9-year free, universal education 'the reality of inequality under universal education is largely ignored. Equality of educational opportunity has never been a central concern put on the agenda of both policy and academic circles' in Hong Kong. After his review of local educational studies on the issue, he commented that these studies are still largely impoverished and fragmentary when compared with those studies conducted in Europe, America and Taiwan.

Tse (1998:101) stated that 'despite the implementation of universal education for nearly twenty years, an increase in educational opportunities did not result in an equal sharing of the opportunities or a reduction of inequality. In fact, differences and inequalities among different levels of school still persist in the current Hong Kong educational system, which are closely related to the factors like class, family background, gender and the like'.

He then urged that 'local studies in future should target the following issues: 1. Exploring the situation of different distribution of educational opportunities; 2. Inquiring into the causes of these differences; and 3. Analysing various educational reforms and policies, as well as explicating their direct and indirect long-lasting influences on the distribution of educational opportunities. He called for greater responsibility to be taken by scholars in education to explore the causes and situations of the differences and inequalities of educational opportunities (Tse 1998:101). His concerns inform the present study on the new school choice policy implemented in 2001.

Lastly, social stratification and the elite class in Hong Kong. Although the average citizen enjoys the third-highest living standard in Asia, there has been a great income disparity in Hong Kong. Postiglione (1991:23) stated that the Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality in a population, is 0.43 in 1971, remained nearly the same in 1981 and with little change until 1991 in Hong Kong. It is higher than that of the USA, Taiwan, Korea and Singapore (Postiglione 1991). Postiglione also observed the emergence of a politically conscious middle class, which is gaining

more control over the educational system and thus helps ensure that their children inherit their middle-class status.

As regards the influence of family class background on intelligence, So & Siu (1980) did not find any significant differences between middle and lower class children. But in Lee & Mui's (1989) study of early child language development in Hong Kong, they found that there was a significant link between age, gender and a mother's education with their own children's language development. Yu & Bain's (1985) study of 200 primary 1 Hong Kong children on the influence of class and cultural background on the learning of a language found that working class children have weaknesses when learning a second language.

Tsang's (1993) study of educational and socio-economic status attainment in Hong Kong also concluded that both achievement and ascription have joined forces in a particular way in determining the attainment opportunities of young adults in Hong Kong. His study also revealed that achievement is not the sole criterion for the allocation of social opportunities, despite the belief to the contrary of most Hong Kong residents. In fact, ascription also finds a way of asserting itself into the educational system. Though there are some exceptional cases, the class structure in Hong Kong is not, in general, as open as Hong Kong residents believe it to be. By using the method of mobility-table analysis of the 1981 census data, Tsang (1993) also revealed that class-situation inheritance is a prominent phenomenon in the social structure of Hong Kong.

All the above studies pondered the problem of equity within the Hong Kong educational system in a historical sense. As Postiglione commented: 'Little has been done to relieve this problem... this could highlight the gap between the social classes and increase the likelihood that the schools will become an arena of social class conflict' (Postiglione 1991:24). His question and concern of more than a decade ago of 'Whether or not social class conflict can work itself into the cultural fabric of the Chinese society in Hong Kong in such a way as to avoid becoming dangerously divisive remains an important question' (Postiglione 1991:24). Therefore, such an important issue as equality within the allocation process is indeed worth researching.

Now let us turn to the development/expansion of the Hong Kong Education system and inform the reader about the history of the important time line of the Secondary School Places selection/allocation Reforms.

As mentioned before, the Hong Kong colonial government started its initial moves to set up public schooling after 1884, but government provision of schooling was initially small-scale and elitist (Sweeting 1995, Bray & Koo 1999). However, as more and more new immigrants from Mainland China arrived in Hong Kong, the education system expanded and changed a lot over a period of three decades. In order to allow the reader to grasp the main features of the historical development of the education system in Hong Kong quickly, the author would like to use the five main themes suggested by Sweeting (1995). The five main themes are expansionist, sequential, variably private, and increasingly autochthonous and decreasingly gender-skewed (Sweeting 1995).

Firstly, *expansionist*; this means that at any one time, at least one level of schooling provision was growing. Secondly, *sequential*; this means the growth was sequential, starting from primary schooling in the period 1945-1971, then junior secondary and senior secondary schooling followed. The third major area, which entered an expansionist phase sanctioned by the Government, was tertiary education. Thirdly, then, *variably private*; this means that though the private sector acquired huge operational importance in the early stages of each growth phase, a strategy was adopted by the Government to absorb the privately run 'enterprises' into an expanded 'aided' public sector. From 1973 onward, a 'Grant-in-Aid' scheme was set up to provide private groups with government funding for education. Then the number of missionary schools increased further.

In 1978, nine years' universal free education was introduced (See table 1.1). This marked an increased quantity of education provided by the government. Quality education for common people was pursued by pressure groups in Hong Kong throughout the 80s. Bray and Koo (1999: 46) noted that 'By 1984, a prosperous, well-travelled and increasingly influential middle class had emerged' and these groups put pressure on people to adopt the latest fashions from Western countries. The expansion meant that more quality school funding was made by the government to the masses and replaced the quality education previously provided for the 'elite'.

Table 1.1. Time-line of development of junior secondary education and SSPA reform

Time line	Event
Before 1984	Small-scale and elitist
1962	SSEE (Secondary School Entrance Examination: English, Chinese and Mathematics—in one afternoon) & FNSS (Feeder and Nominated School System) Allocation by order of merit for students individually in the whole territory
From 1973	Grant-in-Aid scheme: number of missionary schools increased
1978	Introduction of nine years' free schooling for every child (Expansion of junior secondary education available for all primary school leavers)
1979	Compulsory, free education for children up to the age of 14
1980	Compulsory, free education for children up to the age of 15 who have not completed S-3.
1978-2001	Sufficient junior secondary education available for all primary school leavers and introduction of SSPA 1. Academic Aptitude Test (AAT) on verbal and numerical reasoning 2. Five 'bands' in the order of merit (they were not further differentiated by order of merit within the same band) 3. Device of regionalisation (school nets) based on the scaled internal assessment of students in the same school net. 4. Introduction of random factor
2001-	New SSPA

Fourthly, *increasingly autochthonous*; this means the decolonization of British influence of the Hong Kong colony on education policy and practice. The main localisation began to take place after the Joint Sino-British agreement on the Future of Hong Kong in 1984. Fifthly, *decreasingly gender-skewed*; this means schooling opportunities for females over the post-war period became virtually equal in quantitative terms with the expansion of universal education, senior secondary schooling, matriculation classes and tertiary education.

1.3. Hong Kong society and the education system

Table 1.2 summarises characteristics of Hong Kong society. Hong Kong is a very small, busy, modern and convenient city with a dense population. In 1997/98, Hong Kong had an area of 1,097 square kilometres and, in 2004, had a population of more than 6,800,000. In 1998, Hong Kong had 846 primary schools and 468 secondary schools with enrolments of around 450,000 in each sector (Hong Kong Annual Report, 1998). Most of the primary and secondary schools belongs to the public sector: government and aided (See table 1.3).

Table 1.2. Hong Kong education and society

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>	
<i>Population</i>	6,855,125 people (2004 estimate)	
<i>Age structure</i> <i>(2004 estimate)</i>	0-14	14.2%(Male 510,702; Female 465,145)
	15-64	73.3% (Male 2,461,914; Female 2,560,382)
	65 over	12.5% (Male 394,697; Female 462,285)
<i>Birth rate</i>	7.23 birth/1000 pop (2004 estimate)	
<i>Fertility rate</i>	0.91 born/woman	
<i>Area</i>	1, 097 sq. Km.	
<i>Primary schools</i>	846 with total 450,000 pupils	
<i>Secondary schools</i>	With total 450,000 students (422 grammar schools, 19 technical schools and 27 prevocational schools)	

Source: figures from Hong Kong Year book 1998 and CIA Factbook Hong Kong. Last visited in February 2005
(<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publication/factbook/geos/hk.html>)

Given its infrastructure, it is very easy to access anywhere in Hong Kong within two hours. Generally, Hong Kong parents have high expectations of their children's education. That means if they can afford to pay for travel, they are willing to pay, and this means that distance may not be a problem when choosing a school. Historically speaking, and contrary to other parts of the world, the popular and prestigious schools belong to the public sector. The differences between government, aided and private schools are described in section 1.5.

The education system in Hong Kong is closely modelled on that of the England. Historically, as Hong Kong had been a British colony since 1841, the educational system is similar to that of the England in its structure, organisation, admission, examination regulations and curriculum. However, it is by no means just a duplicate of it (Postiglione 1991), as it has also been strongly influenced by the cultural traditions of China (Bray 1991, Watkins & Biggs 1996).

Bray and Koo (1999:45) commented that modern schooling in Hong Kong 'reflects the synthesis of the British and Chinese systems in the continued use of traditional features of British education (e.g. school uniforms, straight rows of desks facing a blackboard, students standing up to speak to the teacher) and of Chinese education (e.g. memorisation and an emphasis on effort/diligence)'. Furthermore, Cheng noticed that national goals are not part of the documented education as is the case in other East Asian countries such as Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. He stated that among East Asian countries, Hong Kong is the most individualistic and the most westernised in terms of educational philosophy.

Table 1.3. Providers of Primary and Secondary Schooling in Hong Kong 1998

<i>Level/types</i>	<i>Sector</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Evening & Part-time</i>	<i>Both Day & Evening</i>
<i>Primary schools</i>	Government	45	0	45
	Aided	696	0	696
	Private	89	2	91
	All sectors	830	2	832
<i>Secondary schools</i>	Government	37	0	37
	Aided	352	0	352
	Private	82	36	118
	All sectors	471	36	507
<i>Special Schools</i>	Aided	63	0	63
<i>Practical Schools</i>	Aided	4	0	4
<i>Skills Opportunity Schools</i>	Aided	7	0	7

Generally, the structure of the education system and curricula in Hong Kong are similar to the old grammar school system in England, with streaming and selection according to academic achievement, aiming toward higher education. Education starts at the kindergarten stage. Most children attend kindergarten from the age of three. All kindergartens are in the private sector, as are international schools. The qualification level and standard of teachers in kindergartens in Hong Kong varies

greatly, as does the quality of education offered in different kindergartens. The more popular kindergartens tend to charge higher tuition fees.

At the age of six, pupils start their six-year primary schooling. Most Primary schools, however, different from kindergarten, belong to the public sector. Also, historically, due to the limited space in Hong Kong, they often operate bi-sessionally (both morning and afternoon sessions share the same school site, in order to double the places) and the normal class size in public sector schools is about 40 (Hong Kong Annual Report 1995). This phenomenon is very different from modern Britain and the United States where they have more space.

In recent years, as the number of primary school-age children decreased due to the low birth rate in Hong Kong, many primary schools changed into whole-day schools or just simply closed down. Following the 6 years of primary schooling, a three-year junior secondary course is attended. From 1980, by law, all children must be in full-time education and attend nine years of compulsory education from the age of six until their 15th birthday (See table 1.1) (or on completion of Secondary 3, whichever is the earlier). At the end of primary 6, students are allocated secondary school places. Similar to most of the primary schools in Hong Kong, most secondary schools too, belong to the public sector.

The government provides free 9 years (from primary 1-6, then secondary 1-3) of education from 1980 onward. So, at the end of secondary 3, students are selected for subsidised places for the two-year senior secondary programme (secondary 4 and 5), or to craft courses according to internal school assessments and parental preference.

After a total of five years of secondary education, those students who have passed the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE, which is similar to the former 'O' level examination in England) can either take the one-year high level programme (Middle school with Chinese as medium of instruction) or the two-year A level programme (Anglo secondary school with English as medium of instruction). Admission to Secondary 6 depends on results in the HKCEE.

At the end of senior secondary education, students take the Hong Kong Advanced level examination (HKALE). Based on this examination, students are streamed for entry into university; or to a two or three-year vocational course leading to a certificate or diploma; or to a teacher education programme. Before the 1990s, tertiary education was mainly provided by two universities and two polytechnics.

However, it was planned that all students would enter tertiary education after Form 7 and in the 1990s tertiary education expanded and graduates from higher education increased tremendously. Those leaving full-time education at the end of the senior secondary had opportunities for part-time study or vocational training through to degree level. By the 21st century, life-long learning and more flexible access to both higher and further education had been placed on the reform agenda.

1.4. Contemporary Education policy making

The Secretary for Education and Manpower, who heads the Education and Manpower Branch of the Government Secretariat, is responsible for formulating and reviewing education policy, for securing funds in the government budget, for liaising

with the legislative Council on educational issues, as well as overseeing the effective implementation of educational programmes (Hong Kong Annual Report 1998).

Historically, the Hong Kong Education system has been strongly influenced by Western external advisers and examples abound. One example was the Llewellyn Report which was marked by Bray as very 'influential'. Besides its recommendation on language of instruction, access to tertiary education, special education, and the needs of the teaching services, it recommended that an Education Commission should be established to give the Governor-in-Council consolidated advice on the needs and priorities for the Hong Kong education system as a whole (Bray 1991:87).

Thus, since the establishment of the Education Commission in 1984 as recommended by the Llewellyn Report, Hong Kong education system has been influenced by the Education Commission's Reports and Proposals tremendously.

Cheng (1991) stated that before 1997, the government had gained legitimacy in policymaking. It was partly because of its achievements with the economy, and partly because it had been very deliberate in creating citizen credibility in policymaking through the wider participation of expert community members and through consultation with people from all walks of life (20/9/99 Ming Pao Newspaper).

It is stated that members of the community can play an important part in the planning, development and management of the education system at all levels by sitting on advisory bodies such as the Education Commission, the Board of Education, the Curriculum Development Council (CDC), the University Grants

Committee (UGC) and the Research Grants Council; and also by sitting on executive bodies such as the Vocational Training Council (VTC), the Hong Kong Examinations Authority and the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation. Members of the community can also sit on management committees of schools and on the governing bodies of tertiary institutions (Hong Kong Annual Report 1995,1998).

All members in the Education Commission are resident and working in Hong Kong, they often have strong Western links through their own education and other affairs. The top personnel in the Education Commission are mainly composed of economic elite. Postiglione commented that (1991: 30) 'Hong Kong Chinese society differs from traditional and modern Chinese society in a number of ways: its high degree of modernisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation: its dominance by market forces; the erosion of tradition...the lack of a moralising elite; the dominance of an economic elite.

The quotation from the 'Overview of the Hong Kong Yearbook 2000' recorded below indicates the tremendous changes that took place that year and how influential the Education Commission and its reform proposals were:

The year 2000 marked an important milestone in education...In September, the Commission submitted to the Administration the report entitled Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong. The Chief Executive in his Policy Address in October accepted all the reform proposals put forward by the Education Commission for the education system, including the academic structure, the curricula, the assessment mechanism and the interface between different stages of education. The Government has embarked on the implementation of the reform measures (Hong Kong YearBook 2000, Education: Overview).

It should be noted that ‘the interface between different stages of education’ in the above quotation includes the transition mechanism from primary to secondary, that is, the Secondary School Places Allocation System (SSPA) Reform in 2001.

In 2000, the ED started its restructuring and eventually merged with the EMB, retaining the title EMB in January, 2003. So, since then, there has not been an Education Department (ED), as such, in existence in Hong Kong.

1.5. Governance, funding, teaching staff recruitment and salary

We can now look at the governance of education, at funding, staff recruitment and salaries in Hong Kong from a historical perspective.

With regard to the governance of education, under the Education ordinance, the director of education controls all government schools and supervises all other kindergarten, primary, secondary and post-secondary institutions in the territory—except for the universities and polytechnics. The ordinance provides the director with broad-ranging powers over the life and practice of schooling, its staff and pupils, and, in particular, anything that is linked to politics in schools. The government directly manages a small proportion of government primary and secondary schools, while all the aided schools are operated by school sponsoring bodies and non-profit-making voluntary organisations which receive public funds under a code of aid. Aided school cannot collect tuition fee as DSS and private schools do.

Most schools are in the public sector (Hong Kong Annual Report 1995). Each school has an unpaid management committee and supervisor appointed by the School

Sponsoring Body. In most cases, members of the committee are people who are not involved in policymaking or in the day-to-day affairs of the school. The supervisor has considerable legal responsibility and usually works closely with the school Principal in policy and personnel decisions. School Principals, who have absolute power over the staff and pupils, are appointed to government schools by the ED (Now EMB) and to aided schools by their sponsoring agencies (Postiglione 1991:12-13). The aided schools enjoy considerable autonomy.

Secondly, regarding the funding of education, all the schools in the public sector in Hong Kong are publicly funded. The public sector includes all the government and aided schools. According to the government's Code of Aid, all aided schools are funded according to the same formula, regardless of location, sponsorship, or prestige. Schools in the small private sector are funded mainly by students' tuition fees and receive no public funding except for those that join the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) which can receive public funding from the government and at the same time receive funding from students' tuition fees.

Thirdly, we need to look at the recruitment of teaching staff and the standardised master pay scheme. Although teachers in aided schools are recruited and employed by School Sponsoring Bodies, for a long time all teachers' salary scales (except for those in private schools and DSS schools) were standardised and paid by the government through the implementation of a master pay scheme. Those with different qualifications had different starting points and a different maximum salary.

However, discussions have taken place to allow schools to be given a lump sum of money (that would include teachers' salaries) in the future. This means the Principal would have the autonomy to decide how to use the lump sum, which includes the salary scheme of each member of the teaching staff. Thus, the historically standardised master pay scheme of teachers may be altered.

1.6. Education expenditure and budget cut

With regard to education expenditure, about 1.3 million students, or 19.7% of the total population, were in full-time education during the year 1997 (Hong Kong Annual Report 1998). The budget spent on education is about \$ 45 billion each year (3/8/2000, Hong Kong Economic Journal). The total expenditure on education is 4.25% of Gross Domestic product (Hong Kong Yearbook 2000).

In 1997, the Chief Executive, Tung Chee Hwa, identified education as the 'key to the future', as education was perceived as the way to provide adequate human resources and so achieve economic competitiveness. He then instituted the Quality Education Fund (QEF) for school initiatives and research projects. Mr. Tung (PTU News 13 Oct, 2003), reaffirmed his commitment to education and training in his 2003 policy address. 'I can assure you that investment in education will remain our priority, notwithstanding the need to address our budgetary problems.'

However, the main focus of the Financial Budget was to achieve a balanced Budget by 2006-7. This would largely be done through cutting public expenditure and education will not be an exception. Mr. Cheung Man Kwong, the President of the PTU (Professional Teacher Union), protested against such budget cuts in education

as they were affecting education in all sectors (PTU News 13 Oct, 2003). From table 1.4, we can see the continued increase of total public expenditure and public expenditure spent on education.

Table 1.4. Public Expenditure on Education as a percentage of total Public Expenditure

<i>Fiscal year</i>	(A) <i>Total Expenditure \$M</i>	<i>Public</i>	(B) <i>Total Expenditure Education \$M</i>	<i>Public on</i>	(B)/(A)) %
1991-2	108102		19431		18
1992-3	123490		22158		17.9
1993-4	155207		25410		16.4
1994-5	165950		25410		17.4
1995-6	191338		33611		17.6
1996-7	211248		37908		17.9
1997-8	234780		47027		20
1998-9	266447		48479		18.2

1.7. Declining birth rate, decreasing enrolment and new schools

As there is a declining birth rate in Hong Kong, it is said that the demand for basic education, starting at primary school and then at secondary school, would also drop dramatically. The fact that enrolment in kindergartens and primary schools is decreasing (See tables 1.5 & 1.6) but increasing in new secondary schools in recent years has attracted much criticism from the PTU (Professional Teacher Union). From

tables 1.5, 1.6 & 1.7, readers also learn that number and enrolment of aided schools are the highest among the three types of schools in Hong Kong.

Table 1.5. Enrolment in Primary Day schools (with different modes of subsidy)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Aided</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>Total</i>
1990	33146	441908	49865	524919
1991	31996	434487	49455	515938
1992	31050	421768	48807	501625
1993	30275	406683	48103	465061
1994	30093	397163	49591	476847
1995	30006	389396	48316	467718
1996	29659	388741	48107	466507
1997	29567	385945	46399	461911
1998	30270	401316	45216	476802
1999	31152	416044	44655	491851
2000	31623	418362	43994	493979

Table 1.6. Enrolment in Secondary Day schools (with different modes of subsidy)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Aided</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>Total</i>
1990	37625	325604	68152	431381
1991	38400	337342	60597	436339
1992	38604	349036	58145	445785
1993	39246	358429	58260	455935
1994	39091	362445	56663	458199
1995	38905	366377	54563	459845
1996	37728	372584	55346	465658
1997	37444	367242	53432	458118
1998	36705	365485	53709	455872
1999	36502	367648	49315	453465
2000	36662	371259	48772	456693

Table 1.7. Student enrolment (Full/Day time): 1998/9-2001

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Kindergarten</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary (include lower, upper & Secondary 6-7)</i>
1998/99 (000):	175.1	477.1	468.0
1999-2000 (000):	171.1	491.9	453.5
2000-2001 (000):	160.9	493.9	456

1.8 A summary

In this chapter, on one hand, I have provided a general context of the education reforms with a brief introduction of Hong Kong society, its education system, structure, policy making, governance, funding, expenditure, development, expansion, the important time line of Secondary School Choice Reforms and the availability of secondary education in Hong Kong. On the other hand, specifically, I have also outlined five historical characteristics of differentiated secondary education opportunities inherent in Hong Kong society: the inequalities issues inherent in the organisation of selection, the role of English as cultural capital that leads to the demand for EMI schools and to debates surrounding the MOI policy, the unequal quality of education within the private and public sector and the notion of equity in Hong Kong society.

All these characteristics and inequalities inherent in the SSPA process historically in Hong Kong, though after the implementation of universal education and increase in educational opportunities, inequalities, as Tse (1998:101) stated, 'still persist in the current Hong Kong education system, which are closely related to the factors like class, family background, gender and the like'. Tse's call for scholars in education to explore the causes and situations of the differences and inequalities of educational opportunities informs the present study on the SSPA implemented in 2001.

In the next chapter, we will explain the reform and the official rationale of the SSPA in 2001 in detail. We will also provide the historical reform of the SSPA before 2001, the scope of choice, the demand and supply of secondary situation in recent

years in Hong Kong. All these, I hope can let readers comprehend and grasp the local unique and complicated secondary school choice situation in Hong Kong.

Chapter 2 Secondary school choice and reforms in Hong Kong

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to give more detailed background on the SSPA reform in 2001 and before 2001. Thus I will give a brief historical background of the SSPA from 1962 to 2001 and the details of the SSPA reform policy changes in 2001 and its rationales. Besides, I will present types of secondary schools and the changes of demand and supply of secondary school places before 2001 to let readers know more about scope of choice and the secondary school market in Hong Kong.

The framework of this chapter thus includes: firstly, reasons for the education reforms in 2.2; Secondary School choice from 1962 to 1978 in 2.3; Secondary School choice from 1978-2001 and the more comprehensive approach (adding of random element and mix-ability) in 2.4; the detailed changes (includes the future agenda) of the SSPA in 2001 in 2.5; scope of choice (classification of secondary schools), popularity and tuition fee in 2.6. And lastly, the secondary school market situation in Hong Kong in 2.7.

2.2. Reasons for the reforms

The education reforms in Hong Kong were influenced by exogenous as well as endogenous forces (Sweeting 1995). Such forces include the region's geographic

location, population size, socio-political systems, the stages and pattern of economic development, technological advancement and the level of educational development (Bray & Koo 1999:4).

Before I present the reforms of secondary school choice historically, it is perhaps pertinent to look at the variety of factors that affect this issue: namely, the economic, financial, technological, political, global, cultural, educational and human resources factors.

Table 2.1 Economic production Ratio (%) 1980-1997

	<i>Primary production</i>		<i>Secondary production</i>		<i>Tertiary production</i>	
	1980	1997	1980	1997	1980	1997
<i>Hong Kong</i>	1	0	32	15	67	84

Sources: Extracted from World Bank (1999), World Development Report, Table 4.2.

Regarding the economical and financial factor, as the policy document stated that ‘We are seeing substantial changes in the economic structure and the knowledge-based economy...Hong Kong is facing tremendous challenges posed by a globalised economy...’ (Education Commission 2000: 3), we know that economic and financial reasons are the main reasons for the education reforms in Hong Kong. However, I am now going to add some information on the economic and financial context in Hong Kong, starting with the substantial changes in the economic structure and the tremendous challenges posed by a global economy. In 2000, Cheng (2000a: 125-127, 2000b: 3-4), using the World Bank statistics of 1999 to support him, argued that the

production mode in Hong Kong has been changed from secondary production to mainly tertiary production (See table 2.1).

The World Bank statistics of 1999 also show that people in Hong Kong are mainly employed in tertiary industry - male (60%), female (66%). They reveal that the number of white-collar workers exceeds that of blue-collar workers and that this trend may increase more in the near future. Cheng (2000a, 2000b) argues that Hong Kong is advancing towards a knowledge-based economy and as the production mode changes, so the education mode needs to be changed accordingly. Otherwise, we may not have an adequate labour force necessary for the economy in Hong Kong.

Furthermore, the economic recession and deficit in Hong Kong placed great pressure on the post-colonial Hong Kong Government. The Hong Kong economy was booming in the eighties and nineties. However, after achieving double-digit growth for four years in a row through open economy links with the rest of East Asia, Hong Kong was hit hard by the two economic recessions of the past few years. The first was the Asian financial crisis in the final quarter of 1997. The second was the global downturn of 2001-2002. We can see the seriousness of the Asian crisis for Hong Kong in the 1999 and 2000 Budget speeches:

The storm has lasted longer and spread wider. It was more severe than anyone had expected. Few, if any, sectors of the local community have been left untouched by its passing. During 1998, external demand for our goods and services weakened dramatically, the Hong Kong dollar came under acute speculative pressure, asset prices dropped sharply and unemployment surged...Many companies have downsized or closed down. Many people have suffered a pay freeze, a pay cut or even unemployment...1998 brought the worst economic setback our present generation has ever seen (Hong Kong Budget Speech 1999: paragraphs 1-5).

...our record of uninterrupted economic growth was destroyed as we fell prey to a sharp and sudden economic downturn...(Hong Kong Budget Speech 2000: paragraph 2).

In 1999, the seasonal unemployment rates in Hong Kong were 6.2%, 6.1%, 6.1% and 6%. As many people suffered a pay cut and pay freeze, the number of applications for income support accelerated and rose from 227,454 in December 1998 to 230,681 in December 1999. The amount of money delivered in income support exceeded 14 billion Hong Kong dollars (Hong Kong in figures 2000). Furthermore, as there had been four years of deficit, it was decided in the 2003 budget that there would be a five-year plan to constrain public expenditure in order to keep a balance, rather than have a deficit on the budget. There will be large expenditure cuts in health, social welfare and education (Hong Kong Budget Speech 2003, PTU News 13 Oct, 2003).

With regard to information technology advancement and human capital factors, the government also faces the pressure of globalisation and the shortage of adequate human capital. This adverse factor was mentioned in the Policy address of Mr. Tung in 1999. The strategic measures mentioned in the Budget Speech of Donald Tsang in 2000 are for Hong Kong to reinvent itself as a knowledge-based and technology intensive economy by putting special focus on strengthening our human capital and encouraging our citizens to acquire new knowledge and skills (Budget Speech of Donald Tsang in 2000 paragraph 53 and 211):

Our prospects in the longer term will be influenced by several major developments. The two most important are the irreversible trend of globalisation fuelled by technological advances and our country's more /rapid development after entering the WTO. Domestically, Hong Kong is reinventing itself as a knowledge-based and technology-intensive economy, and this process will entail adjustments on the part of individuals and businesses as well as the Government ...In this budget, I have sought to -re-affirm the economic and financial principles behind

Hong Kong's success as we enter the 21st Century; outline our strategy in response to the external and internal changes facing us and to position ourselves to take advantage of the enormous opportunities presented to us in this new era; provide funding support to enhance social services, putting special focus on strengthening our human capital and encouraging our citizens to acquire new knowledge and skills; continue to improve our financial position and our public services through controlling government spending and through public sector reform, and explain clearly the potential problems which could challenge our prudent management of public finances in the future...

Cheng (2000a, 2000b) stated that in order to face all the challenges posed by the advancement of information technology and the global economy, education in Hong Kong needs to be reformed accordingly in order to train the kind of human resources that we need. He suggested that 'life long learning' for all the citizens in Hong Kong is the way forward for a 'knowledge-based economy' there. It is what Brown and Lauder (1997:179) described as:

Underlying these economic forms of investment is a vision of a society permeated by a culture of learning; for it is the knowledge, skills, and insights of the population that is the key to future prosperity.

Furthermore, Cheng (2000a, 2000b) urged that our tertiary education should have a mission to produce the kind of human resources we need: self-learning, organising concepts, communication, team-work, adaptability and innovation. And therefore, we need to reform our career education, curriculum, examination and assessment modes accordingly. We need adaptability, creativity, communication skills, self-learning and co-operation so that the knowledge-based economy can compete successfully with other countries globally. The policy makers, therefore, need to reform the existing education system in order to enable the majority of Hong Kong people to achieve lifelong learning and an all-round education. This is what a

number of countries, such as Sweden, Norway, the UK, Holland, Italy, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore started in the mid-90s (Cheng 2000a).

With regard to skill formation, Ashton (2005) argues that in the past Hong Kong could be identified as a typical case of market-led development, compared with the state-led developments of other Asian countries (Ashton & Sung 1997). Now, however, the government's expectation of education in Hong Kong is to train and provide the type of human capital and resources for the knowledge-based economy. The Education Department (ED) was also restructured into the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and the education reforms in Hong Kong gained momentum soon after.

Regarding the political transition before and after 1997, Sweeting (1995) predicted that, politically, the change of sovereignty to China is probably the most momentous transition to have affected Hong Kong in the period following the end of the Second World War. His case studies of four educational policy-making processes and products provided evidence of how and why the multiple transitions that Hong Kong has experienced before 1995- and is still experiencing - have affected both educational practice and educational policy. He predicted and argued that the latest political transition affects education in the fields of curriculum, tertiary education, teacher education and in planning the infrastructure of education.

Furthermore, Mok (1999) commented that in the post-Mao era, the reformers in the People's Republic of China have taken significant steps to privatise social policy and social welfare in the period since the mid-eighties. Guan (2000) also noticed that

before the Market Reform and the Open Door policy, China enjoyed a high level of welfare provisions in social security, education, the health services, employment and housing, and this trend is changing. Guan (2000:115) further stated that 'The general direction of reform is portrayed as neo-liberal, geared to reducing the role of government in the provision of welfare and to increasing individual responsibility for social security and well-being'. The education reform in Hong Kong, too, is heading in the same direction as that of China, though the policy details of the reforms are different.

With regard to global factors and the globalisation process, as mentioned previously, Hong Kong is just one of the many societies in the world that is undertaking a major 'restructuring' of its educational system. Such emergence of similar reforms of marketisation and privatisation in public sectors across the world suggests that it is a global phenomenon and this convergence trend is part of a broader economic, political and cultural process of globalisation (Whitty, Power & Halpin 1998). Although national states can still have room to mediate these globalising forces, no place in the world can remain immune from them (Whitty et al.1998; Henry, Lingard, Rizvi & Taylor 1999, Bottery 1999).

Green (1999) suggests that while policies may converge at the level of discourse, they are divergent at the level of detail (structure and process). This is because the policy context in each place is very different. Green suggests three principal ways in which convergence of policy may occur. Hong Kong probably belongs to the third category. That is 'policy borrowing', a response or solution for governments facing common forces and problems. The common forces are: demographic trends,

economic forces and cultural forces. The ageing of populations and workforces places great pressure on public resources in general and education budgets in particular. The intensified global economic competition has led to tight budgetary controls in order to reduce social costs so as to encourage competitiveness and attract foreign investment. The pluralization of lifestyles, cultures and values of youth and adult life necessitate a diversity and flexibility of education and training provision to suit those in different situations and with different aptitudes (Green 1999).

Bottery (1999:299) argued that 'it is incorrect to suggest that the effects of such global forces upon the institutions within which educationalists work are unmediated'. And therefore Bottery (1999:299) suggested 'while national governments may be under pressure, they are resilient, proactive and still extremely influential in the management of educational institutions'.

Lastly, besides all the factors mentioned above, there is the educational factor to consider - particularly the 'inadequacies within the existing education system in Hong Kong' mentioned in the 2000 Education Proposal (Education Commission 2000).

These inadequacies/problems have included a cramped teaching and learning environment due to limited space; an examination-oriented education system that causes stress, negative attitudes toward learning; elitism and a lack of care for slower learners (special needs children) and a common/centralised rigid syllabus.

The method of teaching and learning and cramped classrooms in Hong Kong seems to hinder the development of creative thinking and motivation in learning. It is very

common to find small and crowded primary and secondary classrooms that are used to accommodate 40 students where both students and teachers work in confined spaces. This has created an impact on pedagogy, as opportunities for mobility and flexibility within classroom layouts are seriously limited.

It is said that the education system in Hong Kong is examination-oriented and that it has placed too much stress on narrow academic achievement. The kind of emphasis also creates lots of stress, labelling effects, failure and negative attitudes towards learning. Although there are many Hong Kong students who achieve excellent results in international tests, there are also some students who are fed up with the spoon-fed nature of the education. In 1999, there were about 23,000 students who had just given up and achieved zero marks in the 1999 (HKCEE) Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (17/8/99 Ming Pao Newspaper). This has caused a lot of worry and has meant that the education system in Hong Kong is considered to be failing and in need of change (25/8/99 Economic Daily, 17/8/99 Hong Kong Economic Journal).

Furthermore, Hong Kong education has been critiqued as being elitist and lacking in care for students with special needs (slower learners for various reasons). Traditionally, teachers, as well as parents and society, have high expectations of their students, even though they have very heavy workloads. For the bright students, this kind of high expectation is good as teachers can assign them challenges that they can finish and enjoy doing. However, for some children, especially the slower learner and for special educational needs' children, their needs are largely ignored.

There is a high uncertainty-avoidance-culture in school life (Leung 1995) where a centralised rigid syllabus and rigid time-tabling hinder the teachers' abilities and attitudes regarding the adoption of child-centred approaches which are said to be good in developing creative thinking in children. Furthermore, teachers are used to whole-class teaching, an authoritative style, a heavy teaching workload, fragmented subject-based orientation, stress order, strong discipline and conformity. Teachers are also used to planning and working according to plan and in believing students should be taught the same thing in order to be fair to each student (Leung 1995). All of the above may explain some of the factors that caused some students lose motivation in their early learning years. I will let the readers know more about the rationale behind the SSPA reform specifically in 2001 later in section 2.5

2.3. Secondary school choice---1962-1978

From 1962 onwards, there were two major mechanisms for selecting primary 6 students for Form 1 places. Firstly, there was the Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE), whereby Primary 6 students sat three papers---English, Chinese and Mathematics---in one afternoon. Those who scored high would be given places in schools of their high-priority choices. These better-quality, five-year places were usually in the government, aided or subsidised public sectors. Other students who did not perform as well were allocated to 'bought places' in three-year private schools in the private sector. The remainder would continue their education in private schools paid by their parents or exit formal schooling and enter the job market at that point.

A second mechanism of allocation was the Feeder and Nominated School System (FNSS). Both feeder and nominated schools had their own 'linked' primary or secondary schools. This system granted discretion to some secondary schools to select Primary 6 students from their own feeder or nominated primary schools. Through this arrangement, primary school children could secure places in their favourite secondary school, according to a whole range of affiliations such as the status of one's primary school to family connections with particular personnel of the school authority (Lee & Cheung 1991:149-150).

However, Lee & Cheung (1991:152-4) noted that ever since its implementation in 1962, the SSEE was subjected to constant criticism. The criticism could be best summarised as follows: First, undue pressure was exerted on Primary 6 students since their future was determined by a 'one-shot' public examination administered in one afternoon. If a child failed in the SSEE on that particular afternoon, it meant that he/she had failed forever, no matter what his overall primary school learning performance had been.

Thus, both the pressure that was generated and the validity of a 'one-shot' test were criticised. Second, since only English, Chinese and Mathematics were tested, it resulted in an unbalanced primary education at the expense of other subjects not tested in the SSEE. Third, as students were allocated to different secondary schools according to their performance in the examination, the most academically able students were creamed off by the "elitist" schools, perpetuating the differential standards among secondary schools (Lee & Cheung 1991:149-150). The FNSS was also criticised for its great autonomy in admitting students from its feeder or

nominated primary schools that were usually the most popular, famous ones in the territory.

2.4. Secondary school choice---1978-2001

The reform of the allocation of secondary school places which were aimed at alleviating the problem caused by selection in Hong Kong started in the mid-1970s and 'spanned the entirety of the 1980s' (Lee & Cheung 1991:149-150). As the public was critical of the SSEE which was mentioned above in 2.3 and pressed for the expansion of educational opportunities for all primary-school leavers, the government then introduced the 9-year universal, free and compulsory education. It also designed another mechanism, the SSPA, which followed the principles of regionalisation (organised around geographical school nets) and mixed-ability intakes so as to regulate the transition of students from primary to secondary schools and which would replace the undesirable SSEE (Lee & Cheung 1991:149-150).

In 1976, it was announced that the last SSEE would be held in 1977 and a new system, the Secondary School Places Allocation System (SSPA) would come into operation in 1978. The 1978 SSPA was different from the SSEE in four ways. First, the SSPA made internal assessments of students over a period of one and a half years in all subjects, other than in physical education. This took place from the 2nd term of primary 5 to the end of primary 6, and replaced the former SSEE testing of students in only three subjects in one public examination in one afternoon.

Second, whereas the SSEE made an order of merit for students individually in the whole territory, the SSPA introduced the geographical school nets. The entire Hong

Kong territory was divided into twenty-four school districts, each of which included all primary and secondary schools in the same area, forming a school net. Five attainment bands were defined, based on the scaled internal assessment of students in the same school net. The top 20 % of students in the same school net go into the first band, the next into the second band, and so on. Parents expressed their school choice by filling in and submitting their School Choice Form, and pupils were allocated to schools in order of bands. By the time the band V pupils were allocated, most schools in a net would be full and these students were then allocated to the least popular schools. When the schools in a school net are unable to cater for all the pupils in that district, it is the band V pupils who will be allocated to schools in another school net.

The third difference from the SSEE was that instead of relying totally on the order of merit of each student, the SSPA allowed for a certain degree of randomisation in the allocation of places. That is, although students in the first band were given the priority in allocation over students in Band II and below, they were not further differentiated by order of merit within the same band. Therefore, when schools of their first choice were over-subscribed, those places would be allocated randomly by computer.

Finally, some changes were made to the FNSS: participating schools in the system retained 10-15 % of discretionary places, plus a certain percentage of 'reserved quota' for the eligible students from their linked primary schools. The maximum reserved quotas for 'eligible' students was reduced from 85% to 50% for feeder schools, while that for the nominated schools was to remain at 25%. 'Eligible'

students were those who were in either Band I or Band II and had chosen the parent schools as their first choices. The rest of the places in these schools in the FNSS would be left for open competition in the SSPA.

2.5. SSPA reform and its rationale in 2001

The SSPA reform proposal in 2001 includes the proposed changes in the Discretionary Places stage (DP) and Central Allocation stage (CA) in 2001 in the transitional period 2001-2005, the future reform agenda, its rationale and main procedure of the allocation process in 2001. Let us now look at the reform agenda of the SSPA and its rationale (See table 2.2).

Table 2.2. Detailed changes of the SSPA during the transition period 2001-5 and the future reform agenda Proposed in 2001

<i>SSPA policies</i>	<i>Before 2001</i>	<i>Transition period 2001-5</i>	<i>2005-2006 onward</i>
<i>Abolition of AAT (Academic Aptitude Test)</i>	AAT as scaling system to stream students with their achievement in the internal school assessment into five bands	Abolition of AAT and replacement by the school's past three years of AAT results as scaling system in the transition period of 2001-2005	(to be decided after 03-04 evaluation----- see table 2.4.)
<i>Number of Bands</i>	5	Reduce 5 bands into 3	(to be decided after 03-04 evaluation---- see table 2.4)
<i>Increase of DP (Discretionary places) percentage</i>	10%	20%	30%
<i>Number of DP schools that one can apply to</i>	1	1	2

As already stated, the education system in Hong Kong is examination oriented. After its review on education, the selective mechanisms at P1 and S1 were regarded by the Education Commission as hurdles which put too much stress/pressure on the intellectual development of students, rather than on the development of their ethical, physical, social and aesthetic faculties, thus imposing many restrictions on real learning.

Therefore, it was suggested (Education Blueprint for the 21st Century 2000:44) that: firstly, the AAT under the SSPA should be abolished to avoid unnecessary drilling; secondly, bands should be reduced to remove the labelling effect; thirdly, the proportion of discretionary places should be increased appropriately to broaden the admission criteria. In the long term, they do not recommend any form of public assessment for SSPA purposes. The Government then accepted the Commission's proposals and, accordingly, put forward a reform agenda for the SSPA. These significant changes were then quickly implemented in 2001.

Briefly, the 2001 SSPA is different from the 1978 SSPA in three ways: firstly, the AAT (Academic Aptitude Test) which was used to scale students' internal school performance, was abolished and replaced with the average AAT results of the past three years (1997-2000) of each primary school. Secondly, the banding of students were reduced in number from five to three. Thirdly, the number of discretionary places increased from 10% to 20% in 2001 and may increase further to 30% in 2006.

Table 2.3. The two stages of the SSPA (Secondary School Places Allocation: DP & CA) in 2001

<i>The two stages</i>	<i>Discretionary Places (DP)</i>	<i>Central Allocated Places (CA)</i>
<i>Application time</i>	January to March	May
<i>Result announced</i>	July	July
<i>Restriction on school nets</i>	No restriction	Based on school net
<i>Who applies</i>	Parent	Parent
<i>Procedure</i>	Apply to the chosen school (with/without Interview)	Apply through E.D. by filling in a choice form (make their choices from the school net list and place them in an order of preference.--1-30 choices)
<i>% places</i>	In general, secondary schools participating in the system are allowed to reserve not more than 20% of their Secondary 1 places as discretionary places for admission of students before the central allocation.	All the places in school deducting the repeaters and the discretionary places that have already been offered to students during first round.
<i>Main elements</i>	School decision- up to schools to decide whether a student is accepted/selected in accordance with its admission/selection criteria	Seven elements of Computer Allocation by School net, Allocation Bands with internal assessments with scaling mechanism- made with pass 3 years of AAT result) Random Number Parental Choice 7. ***Scaling & Banding separately by sex and allocation separately by sex
<i>Appeal</i>	No appeal	Can appeal and be reallocated again (the whole process is completed within 14 days)

From the table (Table 2.3) illustrated below, we can see that there are two main stages within the SSPA: the Discretionary Places (DP) starts early in the period from January to March, while the Central Allocation (CA) starts in May. The CA also includes the Feeder and Nominated School Schemes that only involve a small number of Secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Under the Feeder School Scheme (See Appendix A: 8), a parent secondary school may reserve, after the deduction of repeater and discretionary places, a maximum of up to 85% of the remaining places for its feeder primary school.

Under the Nominated School Scheme (See Appendix A), a parent secondary school may reserve, after the deduction of repeater and discretionary places, only a maximum of up to 25% of the remaining places for its nominated primary school. As mentioned previously, parents of the nominated or feeder primary school have priority in securing places in the feeder and nominated secondary if they choose the parent school as their first choice in their choice form.

Furthermore, with regard to the application of discretionary schools (See Appendix A: 9), this is different from the CA (Central Allocation) in that parents can choose a school outside their local school net. In general, secondary schools participating in the SSPA are allowed to reserve not more than 20% of their Secondary 1 places as discretionary places (DP) for the admission of students before the central allocation (CA). Parents apply to the chosen school themselves from January to March. The schools may arrange interviews but no written test should be conducted. If a student is accepted by a school to fill a discretionary place, he/she will not be allocated

another place in the central allocation (CA) and it is up to the chosen school to decide whether a student is accepted or not.

If this is compared to discretionary places (DP) before 2001, then those in 2001 or after seem to increase parental choice in two ways; firstly, secondary schools in the public sector could only allocate 10% in the past, whereas they can now allocate 20% of their Secondary 1 places in the period 2001-5, and this may increase to 30% in 2005-6 after a review of the policy in 03-4. Secondly, students who could only apply for only one discretionary secondary school in 2001-5 may apply for 2 discretionary secondary schools in 2005-6, although all of this may be subject to change or amended under the 2003-4 SSPA evaluation.

In fact, the evaluation took place in 2005; we can see the proposed post-transition SSPA mechanism in table 2.4, column 3.

Table 2.4 The proposed Post-transition SSPA Mechanism (EC, Review of MOI & SSPA 2005: 36-43)

	<i>Existing mechanism</i>	<i>Proposed mechanism</i>
<i>DP quota</i>	20% (provide the 'rank order list' to secondary schools)	30% (ceasing the provision of 'rank order list' to secondary schools)
<i>NO. of DP schools that can apply to</i>	1	2
<i>Allocation bands</i>	3	No change, remain 3
<i>CA not restricted by school nets</i>	Not applicable (Restricted)	10% of CA places in each school not restricted
<i>Scaling of P6 student's IA results</i>	The last 3 years of AAT results (perceived as out-dated, invalid and unfair)	Use two most recent * Pre-S1 HKAT result (curriculum-based, perceived as consistent, valid and fairer) to derive the instrument for scaling the IA results.

*Pre-Secondary 1 Hong Kong Attainment Test

Having presented the SSPA reform agenda and the changes in 2001, we can now try to improve our understanding of the seven elements (See table 2.3 Row 8, Column 3: Elements 1-7) within the computer allocation (CA). The main elements of the SSPA mechanism (Also see Appendix A:1-9) can be summarised as the followings: computer allocation by allocation bands (with internal assessments & scaling mechanism); by random number, by school nets; by parents' choices of schools. The readers also need to be informed that there was different treatment of boys and girls in the 1999-2001 SSPA cycle (See Appendix A: 4 & 7) and will be presented below. The explanation and illustration are mainly extracted from the official SSPA document in 2001 (See Appendix A).

Firstly, with regard to the element of computer allocation by allocation bands (with internal assessments & scaling mechanism), a Primary 6 students' chance of allocation to a school of his/her preference depended mainly on his/her position in the order of merit of his/her own school internal record. This order of merit was based on the schools' internal assessments at the end of Primary 5, both mid year and end of Primary 6.

As different primary schools might have different standard of marking and assessment might vary from school to school, a scaling mechanism was employed to scale and convert each school's internal assessments and put all participating schools into an order of merit. As AAT, the test which used to scale schools, was abolished in 2001, the average of each primary school's AAT results in the past three years (1997-2000) was used to scale students' school internal assessment result for the purpose of determining their allocation bands (See Appendix A:1 & 2).

The internal assessments of boy students and girl students were scaled separately for ranking into allocation bands. That was, the internal assessments for all boy/girl students scaled in a school net were put into a separate order of merit for determination of their allocation bands, each consisting of 1/3 of the total Primary 6 boy/girl students in the school net (See Appendix A: 4).

As stated in the Outline of the SSPA (See Appendix A), in order to keep a gender balance of each co-educational secondary school, the places of each co-educational secondary school were divided into places for boys and places for girls before the allocation process commences. During the allocating process, boy students and girl students were dealt with separately in the SSPA (See appendix A: 7).

Secondly, in 1999-2001, the whole Hong Kong was divided into 18 school nets and generally each school net comprises all the participating primary and secondary schools within the area. In some cases, a few schools from neighbouring area were included in the list too (See Appendix A: 3).

Thirdly, the computer-generated random number that was allotted to each student determined the order of allocation within the same allocation band. This random number was generated by the computer before the running of the allocation programme and has no connection with the Student Reference Number (See Appendix A: 4).

Fourthly, with regard to the element of allocation by parents' choices of school, each year in early May, parents make their choices from the Secondary School List provided by the Education Department and place them in an order of preference

(from 1 to 30) in the School Choice Form. School places allocation procedure was done according to the order of preference indicated by parents in the School Choice Form (See Appendix A: 5).

All of the examples and explanations of the SSPA mechanism below are taken directly from the official document from ED to the public (See Appendix A: 6 & 7).

Table 2.5. Example of allocation by Net, by Band and By Parental Choice in School Net X

<i>In School Net X</i>			<i>Numbers</i>
No. of Allocation Band I boy students			1000
No. of Allocation Band I boy students choosing School A as first choice			150
No. of boys' places available in School A			100
	<i>Boy Student A</i>	<i>Boy Student B</i>	<i>Boy Student C</i>
NAME	CHAN	LEE	WONG
<i>Allocation Band</i>	I	I	I
<i>Random No.</i>	120	50	150
<i>1st choice</i>	School A	School A	School A
<i>2nd choice</i>	School B	School B	School B

Allocation was done on a school net basis and order of allocation depends on students' Allocation band. That was Students in Allocation Band 1 were first allocated Secondary 1 places according to their parents' choices, then students in Allocation Band 2 and 3 respectively. Within the same band, each student was allotted a random number, the smaller the random number of the student would be allocated a place first. Within an allocation band, first choices were allocated first,

then second choices and so on. The following example demonstrates the actual allocation procedure for a boy student (See Appendix A: 6 & 7). As noted before, boys and girls were dealt with separately in the SSPA in 2001 and the following example also applies to girl students but separately (See table 2.5).

As only 100 boys' places are available in School A in School Net X (See table 2.5), Lee, with the allotted random number 50 will be allocated to School A while Chan, with the allotted random number 120 may not be allocated a school place according to his first choice if all the places has been chosen/filled. Then, the computer, after screening the first choices of all the boy students in the same allocation band, will read the second choices of all boy students (including CHAN if he has not been allocated one) in the same allocation band who have not been allocated a place in their first school choice.

Suppose there are 650 boy students still unallocated after the computer has processed the first choices of all the Allocation band I boy students, and among them 8 (including CHAN) have chosen School B as their second choice. If School B has 10 places left after the first school choice allocation and has enough places left to accommodate the 8 boy students, CHAN will be allocated to the school according to his second choice while WONG, may not be allocated to school B according to his second choice if other boys with random number before him all choose school B. The computer will read Wong's third choice, fourth choice and so on in the same way until he is allocated a school place. However, WONG's order of merit based in internal assessment may be higher than CHAN and LEE. This is in line with the

policy of mixed-ability intake for schools by employment of random factor (random number allotted to students) in the central allocation (See Appendix A: 7).

From the above explanation of the SSPA, we learn that parents' matching of student's banding with the appropriate school place is the main factor in being successful in obtaining the school they want for their children. Since matching is important in the choice process, adequate information from the primary school is vital for making a school choice in Hong Kong. However, primary staff and parents have no way of knowing the official allocation band of a child or his random number, so instead they have to estimate according to primary staffs' past experience.

Furthermore, relying on this kind of information from primary school staff is problematic. What if a teacher is new and too inexperienced to give parents accurate and detailed information? What if individual primary school staff discriminates against some students or show bias towards the better achievers? What if individual teachers are only concerned with school statistics and not in genuinely helping parents? The readers also need to remember the different treatment of boys and girls in the 2001 SSPA process mentioned above. In that year the ED also adopted a remedial mechanism to tackle parents' appeals and complaints. Further mention will be made of this later in the findings chapters.

In short, engaging in this choice game is by no means a simple task. In addition to accurate information on the allocation band of the child, it also requires a certain amount of sophisticated skill by parents. On the one hand, parents need to have

inside knowledge of the school system in Hong Kong. For example, they need to know which districts have differing numbers of band I, II, III schools and places that are available for competition, and how many students are competing and the chances of gaining a favoured school place. The readers need to be reminded that each year, ED (now EMB) provides an individual school report to each Secondary school of overall percentages of the school's intake of band I, II, III students and such percentage may vary each year. The more the school is chosen by parents with band I students, the more may be the intakes of band I students. Thus banding of schools can be changed according to the popularity of each school each year.

As a matter of fact, there are indeed no such formal categories (school bands) according to ED (now EMB). We can say that school bands emerge from the choice process that links to different degree/level of popularity of schools. Therefore, to be successful in this game of choice, parents need to know how many school places are available for their children and how many children are competing for these places in their local district.

On the other hand, parents need to have a strategy in order to calculate their chances of securing the place they want and a corresponding strategy in filling in the School Choice Form and maximising their chances. All first choices are considered before any second choices. As a result, a second or later choice of a given school is less likely to be successful than a first choice because the places in these schools may already be filled, and so on down the list of choices. Parents who make over-ambitious early choices are doubly disadvantaged: not only will their unrealistic choices fail, but their more realistic school choices will also

fail because they are too far down the list. This puts a premium on information and tactical skill in the choice process.

2.6. Types of secondary schools, curriculum, popularity and tuition fee

Now, let us look at the scope/extent of choice and the kind of choices/varieties that are available to the Hong Kong parents in the SSPA in 2001. The majority of students attend public primary and secondary schools in their local school net in Hong Kong. With regard to the public sector, historically, there are many ways to distinguish schools. For example, they can be seen as religious schools or non-religious schools, single sex or co-educational schools.

According to the Report on the Secondary school Places Allocation 199-2001 cycle, there are two main official ways to differentiate secondary school places. Firstly, in terms of the mode of financing schools in 1999/2001. This includes: government schools (7.9%), aided schools (87.48%), Caput schools (1.76%) (A secondary school which receives government assistance in the form of a per caput grant. This definition suggests that the schools are awarded government funding based upon the number of students enrolled) and direct subsidy schemes (DSS) schools (2.86%) (Report on the SSPA 1999-2001 Cycle).

Secondly, in terms of mode of curriculum, which in 1999/2001 includes grammar (89.03%), technical (3.99%), pre-vocational (6.21%), skills opportunity and practical education (0.57%) and Jockey Club Ti-I (0.20%) (Report on the SSPA 1999-2001 Cycle). In terms of the mode of curriculum, parents in general prefer grammar

schools as they pay a high regard to education in the hope that their children can enter College and University (Higher education).

If we distinguish school places in terms of academic achievement (according to % of school intake), they include: Band I, Band II and Band III schools. As mentioned in 2.5, school bands are not formal designations but they emerge from the choice process. They may fluctuate as the % of banding of student intake varies each year and only the school (which gets the report from ED, now EMB) knows its own band. In terms of academic achievement, parents prefer Band I schools (most popular schools academically) so that their children can increase their chances of going to college. However, the number of available Band I, Band II and Band III school places vary in the different school nets. In some school nets, there are more Band II places than Band I and Band III places. In some school nets, Band I places may be very limited.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously in chapter 1, section 1.2, we can distinguish schools in terms of medium of instruction. This includes: EMI (English as Medium of Instruction) Schools and CMI (Chinese as Medium of Instruction) Schools and, as mentioned previously in the MOI policy, of the 400 secondary schools in Hong Kong only 104 are EMI schools. I have already mentioned that parents tend to prefer EMI to CMI.

Regarding school fees, schools in the public sector are free while schools in the private sector are fee paying. It is stated that 'No fees were collected for participation in the SSPA and no tuition fees were charged to any student allocated a Secondary 1

place in a government aided or caput secondary school through the System' (SSPA Report 1999-2001 Cycle: 8: 4.3).

And as mentioned previously in section 1.2, historically the general public prefers government and aided schools with their better quality of education instead of schools in the private (DSS or other privately funded schools) sector. In 1999-2001 SSPA cycle, totally there are only 26 DSS schools participated (2.86%). The DSS scheme was not popular until the government revised it in June 2001.

Before the discussion of the market policies, it is useful to provide information of the secondary school market situation in Hong Kong, that is the demand and supply pattern of different types of school.

2.7. Demand and supply: Secondary school market situation in Hong Kong

I start by describing the demand and supply of different type of schools in Hong Kong. The pattern of demand and supply are illustrated by the survey done by the Secondary School Association of student movement among different type of schools after the SSPA result in July over a five-year period. Furthermore, the survey result can also explain changes, that is, increase and decrease in enrolment size of different types of schools of different popularity.

As the low birth rate and demographic changes have caused a decline in the student population in Hong Kong, the decrease in enrolment in individual schools may become a reality in the near future. However, besides the decrease in the general

student population, there are some other contributory reasons for the changes in enrolment size in different types of school of different popularity.

Generally, the initial planning and allocation of school places by computer is centrally allocated and spread evenly with an average class size of 40 in each school. This kind of planning, however, is disrupted by the enormous amount of activity carried out by parents and schools after the announcement of the allocation result in July.

Parental choice does not come to a halt after the results of the allocation are announced. Hong Kong parents pay a high regard to education and want their children to obtain places in popular schools. They know that many schools employ a second round discretionary place policy, which can enable them to make a change after the result is announced in July each year. All these activities of parents and schools have contributed to the decrease in the student intake of some schools and to the increase of the intake in some popular schools.

Table 2.6. Survey of out-flow rate of Hong Kong schools for the five-year period (1998-2002)

	<i>Overall out-flow rate (EMI & CMI)</i>	<i>EMI out-flow rate</i>	<i>CMI out-flow rate</i>
1998	12.09%	5.45%	15.14%
1999	10.56%	3.62%	13.52%
2000	8.19%	3.57%	10.52%
2001	9.90%	1.90%	13.10%
2002	9.02%	2.97%	11.90%

Source: HK Association of Heads of Secondary Schools: Survey on school choice 1998-2002 (<http://www.hkahss.edu.hk/papers/survey/2002>)

The shifting around has a pattern. We can clearly see the pattern of the flow or shifting of students from the findings in the Survey carried out each year by the Hong

Kong Association of Heads of Secondary Schools (HKAHSS) in Hong Kong over a five- year period (See table 2.6). Out-flow rate is the rate of registered (in July after the result announced) Secondary 1 students transferred to other schools before September that year.

From tables 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9, one can acknowledge the direction of the flow of students and the trend/pattern of the shifting of students with relation to schools of different modes of funding, the different language of instruction and the different banding (different degree of popularity) of schools.

Table 2.7. Average class size in July and in EMI and CMI in September (1998-2002)

	<i>Average class size allocated in July</i>	<i>Average class size in September</i>	<i>Average class size in September</i>
	<i>Overall all (EMI & CMI)</i>	<i>in EMI</i>	<i>In CMI</i>
1998	35.6	No data in that year	No data in that year
1999	38.83	42.01	37.48
2000	38.43	42.26	39.09
2001	38.1	42.6	37.6
2002	38.6	41.3	37.3

Source: HK Association of Heads of Secondary Schools: Survey on school choice 1998-2002 (<http://www.hkahss.edu.hk/papers/survey/2002>)

Table 2.8. Out-flow rate and class size in different kinds of schools (mode of subsidies) in 2002

<i>Types of schools</i>	<i>Out-flow rate</i>	<i>Average class size in September</i>
<i>Overall (all types)</i>	9.02%	38.6
<i>Aid/government</i>	8.11%	38.7
<i>DSS</i>	20.22%	37.3
<i>Privately brought places</i>	22.8%	34.4

Source: HK Association of Heads of Secondary Schools: Survey on school choice 1998-2002 (<http://www.hkahss.edu.hk/papers/survey/2002>)

Table 2.9. Out-flow rate of different bands of schools in 2002

Types of schools	Out-flow rate	Average class size in September
Overall (all types)	9.02%	38.6
Band I	3.08%	40.5
Band I to II	4.82%	41.5
Band II to III	11.04%	37.7
Band III	22.57%	32.9

Source: HK Association of Heads of Secondary Schools: Survey on school choice 1998-2002 (<http://www.hkahss.edu.hk/papers/survey/2002>)

Regarding schools with different modes of funding, the out-flow rate of DSS and privately brought places is very high. It shows that parents prefer places in aided and government schools places than DSS and private school. For the privately bought places, the out-flow rate is even higher than that of the DSS schools.

From the above, we can learn about parents' preferences and also confirm the fact that traditionally, the private sector in Hong Kong is weak and is regarded by parents as offering a poorer quality of education than aided/government schools. In the past, especially before 1986, only those who failed in the examination and could not get a place in aided or government schools had to find places in the private sector. Students who achieved success in the examination could gain a free place in an aided or government school. They did not need to pay the tuition fees demanded from students who studied in the private sector. This is a situation very different to that of the UK where independent schools are often regarded by parents as being better than schools in the public sector.

Regarding the banding of schools, the out-flow rate of Band II to III is more than double that of Band I to II schools. And again, the out-flow rate of band III schools is more than double that of Band II to III schools.

From the out-flow rate of students in Band III schools, one may acknowledge the impact of parental choice on the enrolment size of different types of secondary school in Hong Kong. Though the figure is an average, one can still see the trend or the general impact on different types of schools.

In short, from the above pattern, we can see Hong Kong parents generally favour schools with a high academic level or status (e.g. band I & EMI schools) rather than match children to the special characteristics of diversified schools. After all, there was not such a wide spectrum of diversity of schools in Hong Kong. Thus, one can say Hong Kong parents generally compete for a hierarchy of schools defined by academic level or status (vertical competition) rather than for a choice of schools with diverse characteristics or specialism (horizontal competition).

After I have mentioned all the unique local secondary school choice situation and issues in Hong Kong historically behind the 2001 reform, I think it is time to present a literature review of the quasi-market in education and the debate around the parental choice policy internationally. And this will be in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Literature review of quasi market policies and school choice

3.1. Introduction

As mentioned previously in the preface, marketisation policies have been fashionable reform policies since 1988 in Hong Kong and gained speed after 1997. These policies resemble those introduced in the United States, Britain, Australia and other English-speaking countries in the 80s and exemplify the 'quasi-market' approach in social policy.

In addition to the SSPA itself, and especially its provisions for parental choice of school, this cluster of 'quasi-market' policies in Hong Kong includes: first, encouraging famous, popular government aided schools to become DSS (Direct Subsidy Scheme) schools, in order to provide more diversity and competition. New DSS schools were given valuable land and significant financial support. DSS schools also enjoy much more autonomy than aided schools. They can employ 100% discretionary places. Second, the 'quasi-market' policies also include the devolution of school management (The Self Management Initiative SMI); third, a quality education (Quality Education) emphasising quality control with close inspection/supervision; fourth, the publication of league tables.

All of these policies are represented as giving more 'informed choice' and power to the consumer, whilst encouraging competition and reducing bureaucratic control under the free play of market forces. Such marketisation policies which emphasise

market competition are presented as intended to lead to an improvement in the quality of education and so eventually benefit the entire society of Hong Kong (27/8/99 Hong Kong Economic Daily).

In this chapter, I review the literature on the marketisation policies employed in education in Hong Kong, the development of quasi-market and privatization trend in Hong Kong and the controversial issues inherent in the debate surrounding specifically, parental choice.

3.2. Concept of Quasi-market and its application to the Hong Kong case

The term ‘quasi-market’ is explained by Le Grand & Bartlett (1993:10) in the following terms: ‘They are “markets” because they replace monopolistic state providers with competitive independent ones. They are “quasi” because they differ from conventional markets in a number of key ways...’:

These welfare quasi-markets thus differ from conventional markets in one or more of three ways: non-profit organisations competing for public contracts, sometimes in competition with for-profit organisations; consumer purchasing power either centralised in a single purchasing agency or allocated to users in the form of vouchers rather than cash; and, in some cases, the consumers represented in the market by agents instead of operating by themselves. (Le Grand & Bartlett 1993:10).

Walford (2003:69) also argues that the situation differs from classical free markets, particularly in relation to the demand side, parents and the supply side, schools, in the following five aspects. First, ‘money need not change hands between the ‘purchaser’ and the ‘supplier’. Second, society forces all families to make some sort of ‘purchase’. Third, on the supply side, schools may not be privately owned or, indeed, profit maximisation may not be regarded as the main objective.

Fourth, there is strict control and regulation on the entry of new suppliers in the supply side. Fifth, on the demand side, the purchaser is not necessarily the “consumer” of what schools offer. There are a variety of beneficiaries (Walford 2003:69). Carroll and Walford (1997:4) also make the point that if the wrong choice is made, then, in reality, the option to buy a different brand may not exist:

...more fundamentally, children realistically only have one chance of receiving basic education. If the wrong choice is made, the option to buy a different brand does not really exist.

When compared with other countries that employ quasi-market approach in education, the choice discourse and reform of SSPA in Hong Kong resemble a lot of them. One can compare the typical features of such policies in England and Wales in 1980-1990 mentioned by Croxford and Raffé below (2007: 39):

The typical features of educational quasi-markets are parental choice of school, the publication of information to inform this choice, enrolment-linked funding, the granting of management powers to schools, the corresponding reduction in the powers of educational authorities to plan education, and encouragement to schools to diversify.

Such policies in Hong Kong as the DSS policy, encouragement for the diversity of the school curriculum and other innovations may provide more diversity of schools for parents to choose. The gradually increasing percentage of discretionary places proposed under the SSPA agenda and the encouragement for aided schools to change to DSS status with 100% autonomy in enrolment resemble ‘open enrolment’ in the English education. The ‘enrolment linked funding’ of the DSS schools from the government resembles the ‘per capita’ funding in England and Wales. Though the

difference is, DSS schools in Hong Kong are allowed to receive tuition fees from their students while this is not the case in the UK.

In Hong Kong information is published to inform parental choice, including the Secondary School Profile and schools statistics including HKCEE results and University entrance rates. The restructuring of ED into EMB and the SMI (Self Management Initiatives) policies are similar to the UK case, reducing the powers of educational authorities to plan education and encourage schools to diversify. However, the EMB in Hong Kong can exert strong control through inspection and quality control in the central. This is stated in the 1997 Education Commission No. 7 Report.

All these policies resemble the characteristics or definition of 'quasi-market' policies I will discuss them as the followings:

Firstly, for the 'non-profit organisations competing for public contracts', in the Hong Kong case, as mentioned before, government and aided schools belong to the public sector and the funding of these schools is provided by government. The increase in competition from DSS schools is a case of non-profit organisations competing for public contracts, resembling a quasi-market, though DSS schools, while increasing in number, are not yet the main form of provision.

As most of the DSS schools, besides receive funding from EMB, also collect tuition fees from parents, the Hong Kong case seems also to be going towards 'privatisation' (there are different types of DSS schools in Hong Kong, most of them collect tuition

fees, a few do not collect tuition fee in S1-3). As a matter of fact, DSS schools can be profit organisations, though the maximum amount of fees is controlled by EMB.

Secondly, regarding the consumer purchasing power, in the Hong Kong secondary school education, consumer purchasing power, we can say are centralised in a single purchasing agency, the EMB but not allocated to users in the form of vouchers. And the purchaser, EMB, is not necessary the consumer, the parents or the students.

There are no 'vouchers' in any form in secondary education in Hong Kong. Thus, we can say money changes hands from EMB to both the public sector (government and government aided school) and the DSS schools which may or may not collect tuition fee. Parents of some very famous DSS schools may need to pay great sum of tuition fee. With 100% discretionary places of some famous DSS schools, parents then can apply directly to the DSS schools. The purchasers, in this case, are the parents. So this is very different from aided schools parents. Furthermore, parents who lack the material resources, may lack purchasing power in such DSS schools.

Thirdly, regarding 'society forces all families to make some sort of purchase', in the past, regarding secondary education allocation, we can say, it is highly centralised. But with DSS schools seems provide more diversity, autonomy and increasing discretionary choice, families are encouraged to shop around. The shopping activities are likely to expand with the recent reform policies: the increase of DP% in SSPA, the DSS policy and the MOI policy.

Fourthly, in Hong Kong, aided schools and some DSS schools are not privately owned, so profit maximisation may not be the main objective, at least overtly. This

cannot be a real market but resembles a 'quasi-market'. Also, there is strict control and regulation on the entry of new suppliers on the supply side. EMB in Hong Kong has strict control and regulation over the supply side- government, aided or DSS schools, though DSS schools have comparatively more autonomy than aided schools.

From the above definition and the discussion of how the definition applies to the Hong Kong case, readers learn that there are similarities and differences from other countries which also employ quasi-market policies. The diversity of education markets, or the variations in market strength in different countries, stated by Croxford & Raffe (2007) is caused by three factors: the market model, market conditions, and educational cultures.

The market model can range from a fully planned system to a free market system (Woods et al 1998). The variation depends how many market features there are. That is, the more market features, the stronger the market regime (Croxford & Raffe 2007). Market conditions include all the factors which can affect the operation of the markets such as student population, school size, proximity and diversity. Educational cultures mean the pre-existing practices, beliefs and values of all the participants in the education system such as: parents, educators, principals, local administrators...etc.(Croxford & Raffe 2007).

Besides the above variations in the strength of the quasi market and the factors contributed to it, Hirsch's (Hirsch 1994, Adler 1997) distinction of demand-led or competitive choice versus supply-led or pluralistic choice policies is also very important to the present study of parental choice in the Hong Kong school market

situation. It is stated that demand-led policies aim to encourage competition and supply-led policies aim to increase types of schools available to choose from.

Below, I will present the development of quasi market and privatisation trend in Hong Kong, with the local policy context and details I mentioned in chapter 1 and 2, readers can then have a better picture of the quasi market situation in Hong Kong.

3.3. Development of quasi market and privatisation trend in education in Hong Kong

In this section I will describe the historical development of the market approach, apart from the SSPA which has already been discussed in chapter 2, the discourse of choice and the privatisation trend of secondary school education in Hong Kong.

The official case for choice in education in Hong Kong can be found in the policy document of the Education Report No. 7 Quality Education (Education Commission 1997: 7.18-19). It describes the government's aims for education as follows:

In the Government's Statement of Aims published in 1993, we recognise that one of the aims of education is that as far as possible, parents should be able to choose the type of education best suited to their children, and should have adequate information on which to make informed choices (7.18).

Regarding diversity and privatisation in secondary education, it proposes that the government should review the DSS policy in order to make it more attractive to aided schools aspiring to even greater management and funding flexibility. It states that the private sector can thus become an alternative to public sector school

education, given that more diversity and choices can provide parents with the opportunity to meet the different educational needs of our younger generation:

In the light of the need to inculcate a quality culture in the school system by providing more flexibility in school-based development and more educational choice to parents, we have recommended in paragraph 4.25 that ED should review how the DSS can be made more attractive to aided schools aspiring for even greater management and funding flexibility. In this connection, we recommend that the Government should re-examine the role of and the administrative support to the private schools, and their interaction with the aided sector, with a view to optimising resources; encouraging school-based development which reflects the characteristics of individual schools; and developing a viable alternative to public sector school education which can provide more diversity and choices to meet the different educational needs of our younger generation (7.19).

In 1999, the government launched the pilot Direct Subsidy Scheme and the number of DSS schools participating in the SSPA rose from 9 in 1999 to 24 in 2000 and 26 in the 1999-2001 SSPA cycle.

The year 2000 is described as a milestone in education in Hong Kong, as changes flooded every sector (Hong Kong SAR Government 2000 Yearbook). In fact, the DSS policy for the development of the private sector (privatisation policy) in education in Hong Kong came much earlier, in 1991.

As mentioned above, traditionally, the private sector was small and weak when compared with the public sector. Furthermore, it was perceived as offering inferior quality of education than the public sector.

The Direct Subsidy Scheme, which was introduced originally in Hong Kong in 1991, was revised and updated in June 2001 (after the 1999-2001 SSPA cycle) in order to attract more aided schools to change their status to DSS. Under the updated model, a

DSS school can receive a recurrent government subsidy of about HK\$29,500 per student, providing its tuition fees do not exceed HK\$68,864. The DSS offer is made even more attractive by allowing new DSS schools to also receive their existing aided subsidies during a five-year transition period. It is also stated that while the majority of students in DSS schools are fee-paying, schools must set aside about half of the fees collected for funding scholarships or financial assistance schemes for economically disadvantaged students (World Education News ICP online October 2001).

In October 2001, a few very prestigious, famous aided schools started to consider and apply for DSS status. However, the few prestigious DSS schools (former famous aided schools) did not change into DSS status until September 2002 after the ED/EMB revised the DSS package in June 2001. In 2002, September, St. Paul co-ed, St. Paul College and Tak Mong Secondary School changed from aided schools into DSS schools.

With all the autonomy that DSS schools have, one element that makes the issue more complicated is the contentious MOI language policy implemented soon after the handover of sovereignty to China in 1997. The medium of instruction in aided schools is constrained and decided upon by the ED/EMB on the basis of the ability of the students. However, schools in the DSS scheme have no such constraint and are allowed 100% autonomy in deciding the medium of instruction they wish to employ, regardless of the level of ability of their students. This policy was criticised by the Professional Teaching Union (PTU News 27 Oct, 2003):

...More schools of direct-subsidy scheme are yet to be built. These schools have the advantage of adopting English as the medium of instruction without further justification of their students' language competency, thus recruiting more students from low-banding subsidised schools. This contradictory effect of language policy and the adverse state of competing to attract students among schools are, in reality, the direct aftermath of EMB's mismanagement.

Regarding quality and information, the Education Commission Report proposed that the quality of the product/service provided in each school should be inspected and reported to the public for reference. Thus after the consultation period, it recommended that a well-developed framework of indicators of school quality, context, process and output indicators should commence not later than 1998 ((Education Commission 1997). A 'two-pronged approach to quality assurance' is recommended in the same policy document (Education Commission 1997: 3.1-3.3). This consists of 'internal quality assurance by school, and an external quality assurance mechanism'.

For the internal quality assurance by school, it is recommend that it should be achieved through: a. school-based management; b. co-operation of key players in the school system; and c. self-evaluation (Education Commission 1997: 3.3):

...quality assurance within schools can best be achieved through practising school-based management, which allows key players of school education to participate in setting school goals and developing quality indicators which best meet the needs of schools and students...We endorse the spirit of the SMI as a key factor in the enhancement of quality school education.

It thereafter recommended that by the year 2000 all schools should have put in place school-based management through which internal quality assurance can be achieved.

For the external quality assurance, it included the recommendation of setting up of a Quality Development Committee (QDC), the employment of a whole-school approach to inspection, and to designate and reorganise the staff concerned as Quality Assurance Inspectorate (QAI) in the provision of quality education. It also stated that some respondents suggested that the QAI should develop guidelines with input from front-line educators, release inspection reports for public reference, and assist improvement in school performance (Education Commission 1997: 3.17).

3.4. The debate: benefit and problems of choice

Literatures of quasi-market and school choice abound. Bartlett & Le Grand (1993: 14) proposed four criteria for evaluating the quasi-market reforms: namely, efficiency, responsiveness, choice and equity. As the present research aims to focus on the latter two, I will present in detail below the benefit sought and problems of choice in such policies proposed by the opponents and proponents.

Three main advantages of school choice, as summarised by Gorard, Taylor & Fitz (2003: 14-17) are: Firstly, the libertarian notion of choice for its own sake. Secondly, increased equity: the choice of school extends a privilege to all. Previously, this choice, suggested by Coleman (1990, 1992) was only available to those able to afford houses in particular high-income catchment areas. School choice thus can empower parents who were previously trapped in what Coleman (1990,1992) called the 'iron cage of zoning'. Thirdly, market choice may drive up educational standards (Chubb and Moe, 1990). Through market competition, successful schools will grow stronger while weaker schools will become more

unpopular, progressively losing their per capita funding until they either improve or close. Over time, therefore, the general standard of schools will become higher (Gorard et al 2003: 14-17).

However, though the above advantages of the 'quasi-market' in education look very attractive and persuasive, it is not without problems and critique, as suggested by its opponents.

Regarding the first claim, the libertarian notion of choice for its own sake, there is problem concerning 'whose choice is the focus of concern' and it also leads to the implication of 'increasing the choices open to one set of people may reduce the choices open to others' (Bartlett & Le Grand 1993: 16-17). Besides, there are other problems inherent in the nature of choice itself, as suggested by opponents. These problems include the following: the problem of who is the consumer? The assumption of the 'rational' choice of parents; the assumption of informed choice, the 'perfect' information that every consumer has; the problem of illusory choice--real choice or lottery choice, the problem of structural inequality that may be found in the system, the problem of mechanism of choice: per capita funding and consumer power.

The first problem to deal with here is the argument about who is the educational 'consumer'. Indeed, it can be the child or the parent who may act as the agent or proxy for the young (Jonathan 1997). Difficulties arise when the interests of parent and child (student) differ. Employers also claim that they are consumers and that education ought to provide the kind of employees they need. Obviously, difficulties

emerge when deciding 'who is the consumer and whose need should have priority at any one time' (Bowe, Ball & Gold 1992: 26).

The second problem of the choice policy concerns the assumption that all the parents make 'rational' choices. Regarding this, the policy advocates stated that the policy increases parental choice, in this case meaning the policy increases the choice of each consumer/parent who makes a choice of school for his/her children. However, the opponents argued that not all parents choose schools in this way (Bowe, Ball & Gold 1992: 26). Indeed, research data shows that 'choice means different things to different people in different settings' (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe 1995: 55).

Feintuck (1994) also claims that 'there is strong evidence to suggest that only a minority of parents have in practice been able to encash such rights and this has had negative knock-on effects for those less able or not willing to pursue their claims...' (Feintuck 1994: 52). Jonathan also points out that 'people do not differ merely in their preferences and their resources for obtaining them. They also differ in abilities, understanding, experience and cultural capital, all of which structure preferences, making some possible and others not' (Jonathan 1997: 51).

The third problem concerns the 'perfect information' of informed choice. Lawton (1992:85-86) states that many parents choose without such 'perfect information':

A free market in education is likely to be inferior to a system planned by professionals, because a free market is only efficient if there is "perfect information" or at least very good information and the ability to pay. Many parents are not in a position to know what is on offer, or to know how to judge its quality, nor to pay for what they would like.

The provision of adequate information is specially important in the education setting because it is difficult and costly for parents to detect the quality of education provision before the pupil has spent some time at a school (Bartlett 1993:143). 'It is relatively difficult and costly for pupils to switch schools if the quality of educational provision does not meet up to expectations'.

Furthermore, Bartlett stated that the quasi-market mechanism 'will not work well where imperfectly informed consumers base their choice of school on non-educational characteristics such as the predominant social class...A "bandwagon effect" may develop with some schools becoming increasingly popular and desired whilst other schools develop a poor reputation even though they may be capable of providing effective levels of educational quality. As a result, a minority of relatively privileged schools may be able to reduce costs and increase incomes, while other schools may suffer financial instability'. Thus, Bartlett (1993: 144) argued that inequality in levels of educational provision may increase if such effect occur as a result of a lack of adequate information.

On the other hand, Bowe et al (1992: 27) suggested that the form of information which arises solely from test or examination results is one-sided. A good intake of students may result in them having good results. This does not necessarily mean they have attended a very good school. Furthermore, the imposition of testing (league tables) by the government may, in fact, constrain or construct for the consumer notions of what counts as 'good' or 'desirable' forms of education (Bowe et al 1992:27). In fact, the idea of 'free choice' or 'goal-directed individual choice' can only be preserved by ignoring those factors which influence or construct choices in

the interests of the producers (such as advertising) or the government (such as propaganda, control of the media...) etc (Bowe et al 1992).

With such difficulties concerning information, Lawton argues that 'to talk of a free market is either naive or hypocritical; it can also be argued that what parents want may not always be in the best interests either of the children or of the community as a whole' (Lawton 1992: 85-86). The more sophisticated latest device using the multilevel-analysis model with value-added data in assessing the performance of schools (Schagen & Hutchison 2003, Schagen & Schagen 2005) may be more convincing and may give more accurate information about schools.

The fourth problem concerns whether there is real choice or just 'lottery choice', which can be merely illusory. It is argued that education is a positional good (Hirsch 1977, Brown & Lauder 1997), that is, something which is desired not because of its intrinsic value but because of its scarcity value. Since the scarcity value of a positional good diminishes as the number of people possessing it increases, 'first order choices' provide 'second order choices' as people attempt to retain their higher status.

Brown and Lauder (1997:187, 190) also argue 'when education becomes a positional good and where the stakes are forever increasing in terms of income, life-chances, and social status, powerful individuals and groups will seek to maximise their resources to ensure that they have a stake in the game by whatever means...Therefore, how the state intervenes to regulate this competition in a way

which reduces the inequalities of those trapped in lower socio-economic groups must be addressed...’.

They further argued and concluded that ‘state intervention, planning, regulation...are needed for the creation of a post-Fordist economy’. Moreover, historically and culturally, the Chinese have a high regard for education as it is perceived as offering the chance of social mobility. This may serve to create competition when over-subscribed schools do not have the flexibility to increase places (there is a standard size for all secondary schools in Hong Kong).

Competition for this choice will become more severe as more parents compete for the limited number of places. Lawton distinguishes the difference between offering real choice (where there is a high chance of meeting those choices) and ‘lottery’ choice (where parents might be encouraged to choose, but where there will be a very low chance of satisfaction). ‘The idea of parents being able to choose schools was splendid in principle, but in many areas there were now bitter complaints about the failure of the system to deliver choice’ (Lawton 1992:105-108).

The fifth problem concerns the structural inequality in the system. It is claimed that more choice is good because it is ‘classless’ and fairer than planned provision (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe 1995:11). Apparently, everyone has the chance to choose and to decide upon the best providers of goods and services to meet their needs. However, the reality here is that this ‘choice’ is not neutral or classless. In Ball’s research on ‘parental choice’, the reality is that these choices have ‘class bias’. Social and cultural capital may play an important role in choice making.

‘Knowing how to approach, present, mount a case, maintain pressure, make an impact and be remembered’ (Gewirtz et al 1995: 25) is obviously important. They then conclude that: first, ‘choice is very directly and powerfully related to social-class differences’; second, ‘choice emerges as a major new factor in maintaining and indeed reinforcing social-class divisions and inequalities’ (Gewirtz et al 1995: 55).

For increasing diversity and choice (more freedom or consumer sovereignty) to consumers in curriculum terms, is not an easy objective to achieve. The fact is that, in practice, students do not have real freedom or real choice (Vickers 1991). Case studies in English education show that choices are never ‘free’ nor truly just ‘our own’. Choice, indeed, is always ‘relative to the power that can be exercised within a particular social position’ (Vickers 1991:145-147). All students, parents and teachers may choose sometimes in some sense. However ‘the evaluative basis of choice is never individual only, but always conforms to some code or set of values shared with someone else’. The writers then concluded: ‘From most social positions most of the time, choices are between evils: between “last resorts” and something better’ (Vickers 1991:145-147).

The sixth problem concerns the claim that the mechanism of choice and per capita funding will increase consumer power is argued by opponents, as being illusory (Bowe, Ball & Gold 1992:53). They argued that individual consumers may not have any real power in the educational market, although, as suggested by Bowe and Ball, it is not quite as simple as it seems. In fact, schools are competing to attract greater cultural capital in the hope of yielding higher returns (Bowe et al 1992:53). Feintuck also states that ‘one would not resolve potentially inegalitarian

consequences of oversubscribed schools being able, by whatever means, to select their pupils' (Feintuck 1994:64) and this kind of selection by may cause further racial segregation in the English educational market (Feintuck 1994).

Bartlett & Le Grand (1993:32) also suggested that there may be 'discrimination by either purchasers or providers against the more expensive users', for example, in education, 'the disruptive child from a deprived background'. 'If "cream-skimming" occurs: purchasers can choose for whom they will purchase, and providers can choose for whom they will provide, that is, if they can skim off the cream, then welfare services may not reach those who need them most and equity will not be achieved'. So, they (Bartlett & Le Grand 1993:34) argued that there should not be an incentive for providers or purchasers to discriminate between users in favour of those who are least expensive.

However, there is circumstantial evidence that selection of students from better background did occur (Bartlett 1993:150). Thus Feintuck stated that, choice may not empower parents, but may, on the contrary, just encourage selection by oversubscribed schools (Feintuck 1994: 64). Lawton states that the effect of choice may be a risk if minority interests are fostered and the quality of education for the majority is not being improved (Lawton 1989).

Regarding the second claim of increased equity, Coleman (1992) suggests that changing the basis for allocating school places from one based on 'catchment area' and fixed attendance zones, to one based on choice and 'open enrolment' with no restriction of catchment area (in the case of Hong Kong, there is no individual school

zoning or catchment area as there is in the UK and USA, but one school net composed of 25-40 schools of different bands), will simply alter the basis for segregation, rather than increasing it. Coleman suggested that schooling systems in unequal societies are often socially stratified by income and race. School choice could lead to more equity and to a school system stratified by performance and behaviour (Coleman 1992:260). He suggested that reducing bureaucratic rules and procedures (such as catchment areas) would enable families to choose good schools, which were previously inaccessible to them because of zoning.

In the U.K, Aldridge (2001:83.c) also states that the catchment areas of public schools are the greatest barrier to social mobility. One of his policy recommendations to tackle the problem is by 'reducing the weight given to geographical catchment area as a determinant of access to the best State schools (to counteract the scope for middle class parents to buy a good education for their children by moving to the right area)'. In this way, choice can reduce school stratification by mortgage/income.

However, Ball (1993) argues that whether the market works in the way its proponents suggest is an empirical question. To the contrary, opponents argue that market policies undermine welfare states as they may have the effect of dismantling the machinery through which equity is achieved (Ball 1993, Gewirtz et al 1995).

For the definition of equity, Bartlett & Le Grand (1993:19) define it as 'equity in relation to need', 'we shall consider an equitable service to be one where use is determined primarily by need and not by irrelevant factors such as income, socio-economic status, gender, or ethnic origin'. For need, they regard it as 'referring to

the resource requirements of the individual concerned, with the specific implication that the more care resources an individual requires to bring his or her level of welfare up to some predetermined level, the greater is his or her need'. Thus Bartlett & Le Grand (1993:19) stated that the question to be asked of a quasi-market service with respect to equity is 'whether it improves the correspondence between individuals' resource requirements and their use of a welfare service'.

Whether the choice policy increases equity or segregation, some scholars suggested an examination of the social composition of different schools to determine whether the choice policy increases the inequality of access and increases the polarisation of different social groups or not. Gorard et al (2003:51-52), in using national data to analyse whether school choice increases segregation or not, found that there was a slight temporary increase in the segregation index at the start of the process. They explained this phenomena as a policy-related 'starting-gun effect' where some advantaged groups are likely to be better off at the beginning of the reform. However, segregation will decline and settle after an initial rise:

After an initial rise, segregation then declines and settles at a lower level than before, as the market becomes 'established'. If some sections of society are more aware of changes in policy and more attuned to their new rights as 'consumers' (alert clients') one might expect that they would produce a shift towards stratification in the immediate aftermath of choice reforms whatever the long-term outcomes. Put simply, after any change in legislation, some sections of society will be quicker off the mark in utilising any new-found rights, and it is likely that these sections will comprise those who are already more privileged in some sense. This is what we term the 'starting-gun effect'.

Thus, for Gorard et al (2003), the required skill for school choice can be learned, and once the market becomes established, the segregation index will settle. Their findings

and conclusions are that school choice is better than selection by mortgage and that there is no positive link between education markets and school segregation. Though the disputes over how to measure social differences, which techniques are appropriate for analysing the concept of segregation and the argument over ways of interpreting research evidence (Gorard & Fitz 2000, 2006, Gibson & Asthana 2000, Croxford & Raffe 2007) render the issue even more complicated.

The third claim made on behalf of quasi-markets is that in a free market the aggregate of individual decisions to buy and sell will improve the quality of services and goods through the mechanism of supply and demand.

However, opponents suggest that it is problematic to treat schools as supermarkets that merely respond to the unlimited demands of consumers. Schools have limited places, different localities and traditions. How can schools open new branches like supermarkets? If a school can open new branches, the quality of education that can be offered is already different from the original school (Morris 1994: 31).

Opponents suggest that this kind of 'choice' alters the goods themselves, rather than improves standards. Adler, Petch & Tweedie (1989), after their research relating to parental choice in Scotland (where open enrolment was established in 1981), state that when significant numbers of parents and children leave their original school, the resources of the original school may thus be reduced and the quality of education for those children left behind may be affected.

And when dealing with the promise of raising standards claimed by the market supporters, Adler et al (1989) also note that there is no evidence that the choice

policy has contributed to an overall improvement in standards. With the difficulties in defining the 'quality of education', or what is termed as being an 'effective school', it is difficult to measure whether market forces can drive up educational standards. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, opponents argued that the consequence of marketisation in education might result in school selection, exclusion, segregation and the polarisation of school intakes.

In Hong Kong, Tsang (1997) stated that, inherent in the equality of the 9 years of educational opportunity in Hong Kong, was the inequality of the education process. Tsang (1997) indicated that the development of the universal 9 years compulsory education in Hong Kong was, in fact, just a development from exclusionary elitism (unequal opportunity in access to secondary education due to limited space in the past) to segregated elitism (segregation of social economic composition among schools).

Opponents claimed that the market approach of diversity and choice in education cannot be self-correcting as its proponents suggested and that it may, in fact, bring more harm than good. However, Hargreaves (1996a:131), though he recognises that parental choice may bring some form of selection in oversubscribed schools, argues that unless there is sufficient evidence to show that the costs of choice outweigh the benefits, then diversity and choice is defensible and is based on firm ground through the UN's universal declaration of human rights. He stated that: 'In the absence of conclusive evidence, the discussion and debate is openly speculative... much of this writing is best treated as rhetorical rather than in any sense scientific'. He further argued that 'diversity and choice in the UK are defensible and desirable unless and

until: first, some convincing argument and evidence can be adduced that the costs greatly outweigh the benefits, second, it can be shown that any costs incurred cannot be reduced or overcome by limited state intervention...In UK, it is incompatible with a libertarian position to return to either a pre-1965 selective system or to a pre-1979 comprehensive system’.

For Hargreaves, alternative policies, such as strong inspection and strict control over admissions procedure, would minimise the costs of market diversity and choice and thus there can be no adequate justification for politicians to deny diversity and choice in the UK. Hargreaves (1996a:131) regards that the most promising way of balancing individual rights and collective welfare, ‘is to retain an anti-selective comprehensive principle within a system characterised by unaccustomed and innovative diversity and choice’

On the other hand, Walford (1996a) holds a very different view to Hargreaves’s cost-effect approach and questions the validity of weighing or balancing. To Walford, weighing depends very much on values. Furthermore, he (Walford 1996a: 143) stated that Hargreaves’s cost-effect approach is biased towards choice: ‘this bias shows itself both in the initial formulation of the “balance” and in the practicalities of evidence gathering’. For Walford (1996a:144) the benefit of increased choices are easy to perceive. They accrue to small groups of individuals in the short term, while costs are more likely hidden and to be borne collectively by particular disadvantaged groups and society as a whole. Thus he sees no reason for accepting Hargreaves’s bias towards choice:

...Benefits are likely to be far easier to perceive as they are usually visible in the short term and accrue to a small number of individuals who are aware of those advantages. In contrast, the costs are likely to be longer term, initially hidden, and paid (often unknowingly) by a large number of people.

Walford (1997:517) also indicates that current government policy and the now desirable and widespread view of choice did not simply come out of the air, but had to be generated by government. He states that there is actually very little demand from parents for true diversity in the UK and choice is not naturally paired with diversity, but with selection and inequity of provision. Walford (1996a, 1996b, 1997) believes that, in reality, those policies that emphasise choice and diversity have undeniably led to increased selection and inequality of provision and that greater government controls on admission or more state interventions are not likely to reduce the cost.

In short, its advocates claim that the market approach increases consumer power, choice and diversity. It is also claimed that market competition will bring about rising standards and a good quality of education. Their arguments, as identified and summarised by Adler (1997:307), are that: 'choice might be a fine idea but it will not work in practice; choice might work but it will have undesirable side effects; choice in education is self-defeating; putting power into the hands of parents will make schools more conservative and throttle innovation'.

Adler (1997:307-308) further stated that choice policies vary across countries in terms of: 'whether choice is optional or mandatory; whether or not limits are set on school rolls; how places are allocated when they cannot all be met; whether reasons for choice need to be given or are taken into account; whether or not choice is

restricted to schools within the parent's education authority; whether or not choice is restricted to public schools and whether or not it extends to private schools and whether or not assistance with transport costs is available.'

Besides the formal arrangement of school choice, for scope/diversity of choice, Adler (1997: 308-309) listed the following considerations: 'whether or not different types of school exist; whether or not schools are required to follow a national curriculum and how prescriptive this is; whether or not schools can specialise; whether or not schools are encouraged to adopt distinctive teaching and learning strategies; whether or not the government or the education authorities actively encourage or actually decree diversity'. All these considerations are relevant to the present study of school choice in Hong Kong.

With such a hot debate and complex situation of quasi market regime and school choice mentioned above, what will the early impact of school choice in a unique policy context in Hong Kong on parents and on schools? What kind of response will Hong Kong schools and parents experience and face under the market competition? Will it increase parental choice, or will it increase selection of popular schools. What kind of selection strategy might schools employ? Will there be any change of school intake social composition? Will there be increase of school social mix? Will there be inequality issues related to class, gender and race? All these related to the main and research sub-questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Researching the early impact of the SSPA

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the author aims to give a brief account of the research design and methods used in the current study of the early impact of the SSPA in Hong Kong.

Firstly, every research has a perspective, focus or has aims and research question to achieve and this will be addressed in 4.2. Secondly, before an account of how the research was carried out, the reader needs to be informed of the review in research methodology in the field, in order to understand the rationale and justification of the choice of methodology employed. Thus, the literature review of the methodology, my rationale and philosophy of the research mode employed, how the research instruments were constructed and used, how triangulation was achieved and the justification of the research methodology, will all be included in section 4.3 and 4.4.

Next, I include an account of how the research was actually carried out: including research diary, strength, limitation of the current research with problems in access, sampling, revised research strategy and an account of the quality of the data will be in section 4.5. Lastly, before I present the Findings in Chapters 5 to 7, a summary of all the limitations, issues of validity and the reliability of the present research, and

the manner in which the researcher is going to treat her evidence and draw her conclusion will be provided in section 4.6.

4.2. Research question, focus and aims of enquiry

The main corresponding research question is: what is the early impact of the new SSPA on the two key stakeholders: namely, parents and schools in Hong Kong? The research sub-questions related to the impact on parents include the following: Firstly, how do parents make their choice in the system? Secondly, is there inequality of opportunities for parents to exercise choice in the new SSPA? Thirdly, how do parents comment on the changes of the SSPA from their own perspective, and on the basis of their own experience of the reform. The research sub-questions related to the impact on schools include the following: firstly, how do schools with different popularity respond to the changes of SSPA? Secondly, how does the new SSPA impact on schools with different popularity? Thirdly, how do school administrators (principals and delegate) regard the changes of the SSPA impact on their schools?

As I mentioned previously in the literature review, the issue of equality of opportunities for school choice informs the current research. Therefore, the research focus is to investigate the early impact of choice policy on the key stakeholders, and not on how policy is formed or on the process of formation or policy borrowing through globalisation (Green 1999). In addition, the present thesis also serves the following purposes: firstly, to provide the general public in Hong Kong with a perspective, other than the government/formal/official one. Secondly, to add literature to the research arena within a unique location such as Hong Kong, where

‘...east can meet the west, north can meet south, better than in almost any other society’ (South China Morning Post, 7th, February, 2004). Lastly, to provide both parents and educators with a channel/opportunity to voice their comments on the policy in a systematic way.

4.3. Methodology and justification

In this section, general issues concerning my choice of research mode and my underlying assumption will be presented.

When one considers the research method to be adopted, it is helpful to be reminded of Burgess’s comment (Burgess, 1985:179) that ‘the fundamental principle involved in the use of research methods is that any method of social investigation has to be selected for use in relation to the sociological problem... In this sense, the evaluation of the strengths and weakness of different research methods can only be done effectively in relation to real problems and real research.’ Waslander and Thrupp (1997:339) stated that ‘Markets need to be studied in context because the outcomes generated by educational markets will be determined by both the formal properties of a market and informal arrangements within that market.’

As my main research question is “what is the early impact of the new SSPA on the two key stakeholders: namely, parents and schools in Hong Kong? I aimed at providing the policy context, that is, the formal properties of a market and how schools response to the formal properties, that is the informal arrangements within that market.

However, while every research method has its pros and cons, the choice of the present research method may not be perfect but is grounded in the critical literature review of the field in different countries in the past.

First of all, the research on school choice in education in the USA follows a strong quantitative mode, while in England and Wales qualitative approaches are often used (Whitty et al 1998) in small-scale projects (Gorard et al 2003). Research in New Zealand and Sweden combines qualitative and quantitative approaches (Whitty et al 1998). Furthermore, research on the equality of opportunity of school places in Hong Kong in the past has often used quantitative data (Lee & Cheung 1991, Tse, 1998, Ho, 2002) and lacked detailed in-depth qualitative data.

Table 4.1. Aspects of the education market and researching

	<i>Choice</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Distribution</i>
<i>Focus</i>	Listing of parents' criteria	School strategies in the market place	Who 'chooses' and the impact of choice on school recruitment patterns
<i>Methods</i>	Questionnaires and structured interviews	Questionnaires, interviews, and case studies	Statistical analysis of 'choice-making', appeals, etc. and recruitment profiles

Source: Gewirtz et al (1995:4)

As this present research aims to research the early impact of the SSPA and give stakeholders the opportunity to voice their experiences and perspectives on the policy, it makes sense to use both quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher is also aiming at obtaining information from different perspectives and levels. Thus the key stakeholders - parents, administrative staff and policy makers were selected for interview in order to achieve the aim of triangulation.

Secondly, policy of the education market can take different forms as mentioned above, I admire and thus adopted a research mode that is similar to the research template by Gewirtz et al (1995:4) in table 4.1.

For parents' demand of school place in Hong Kong, I used a questionnaire survey and conducted semi-structured interviews with parents to obtain data of parents' criteria of choosing schools. For schools' response to the school choice reform, I conducted case study of schools with different popularity to see how school response to the SSPA, that is school strategies (the informal properties) in the market place in response to the SSPA reform (the formal properties). In the case studies of four schools, I also tried to obtain data regarding who 'chooses' and the impact of choice on the four schools' recruitment patterns to understand more about distribution. I also conducted documentary analysis (Newspapers & DP Application Forms) to analyse the process of recruitment to schools in Hong Kong from January to March during the Discretionary Places (DP) application stage (see table 4.2).

Furthermore, as King (1987:243) stated: 'all methods have their limitations. There is no best method in the sociology of education, only suitable and feasible methods, so we should try as many as possible'.

Thus the present research employs multi-methods (See table 4.2. below) which include, on the one hand, a parental survey (using a questionnaire) and 12 semi-structured parental telephone interviews to obtain a general picture of the policy impact on parents. On the other hand, a case study (with policy documentary analysis; and observation and interviews with administrative staff) of four

theoretically sampled schools will give a detailed, in-depth picture of the policy impact on schools of different bands (schools with different degree/level of popularity) within the Hong Kong area.

Table 4.2. Research phases, time, research methods, data sources and aims:

<i>Phases & time of researching</i>	<i>Research methods</i>	<i>Data sources</i>	<i>Aims in answering main research questions:</i>
<i>Phase I: April--July 2002</i>	Survey	Parents who chose secondary school places in 2001	The early impact of the new SSPA on HK parents
<i>Phase II: January--March 2003</i>	Case study	Four schools with different degree/level of popularity (Include documentary analysis for triangulation)	The early impact of the new SSPA on HK schools and parents
	Semi-structured Interviews	a. 3 principals and one delegate b. 12 parents c. 2 policy makers	The early impact of the new SSPA on HK schools and parents.

In addition, semi-structured interviews with two policy makers (One delegate from the Education & Manpower Bureau and one from the Education Commission-one of the three who led the reform and drafted the Education Reform Proposal) are also included in order to collect data for triangulation.

Thirdly, I did not have national data from EMB to have statistical analysis of 'choice-making, appeals and recruitment profiles. So for the distribution aspect, what I have is the data from my 905 questionnaires returned from parents, the four case study schools and documentary analysis in order to understand schools' recruitment profiles and some descriptive analysis of choice-making, parents' success and failure.

The lack of national data is a limitation regarding researching distribution. However, as the researcher had tried in vain to obtain the national data from ED (now EMB), the researcher was able to obtain three reports published by ED on the SSPA from 1999-2002 for complementary evidence.

The case study approach has been criticised as having a lack of external validity (generalizability). However, one can still have analytic or theoretical generalisation (Firestone 1993). Three threats (Teelken 1998:45) to the internal validity of case studies are: firstly, the hypothesis cannot be supported statistically. Secondly, the presence of the researcher may influence or change the phenomenon. Thirdly, the researcher may be biased in his/her point of view, interpretation and selective perception. Therefore, the researcher must bear in mind these three threats and try to avoid them during the research process.

Four strategies were adopted to tackle the above threats of validity within the case study method. Firstly, an in-depth study of the phenomenon was adopted, while the phenomenon was explained in its natural context (Teelken 1998:45). Secondly, a certain level of standardisation was sought during the research (observation, interview...etc) (Teelken 1998:45). Thirdly, the data was analysed using a thematic approach (Miles & Hubman 1994). Fourthly, the coding and findings were discussed with supervisors (Silverman 2000).

However, in using a survey, the researcher also had to bear in mind the two main problems of reliability (is the survey measuring things consistently?) and validity (is the survey measuring what it says it is measuring?) The researcher had also to adopt

a reflexive approach towards the quality of data that was produced and had to ensure that each word and question in the parental questionnaire (the survey) and in the interview schedules, was constructed with care so that valid and unambiguous answers could be collected.

As there were so many constraints on researching the SSPA in Hong Kong, the present choice of research design is regarded by the researcher to be the most suitable and possible, given the various limitations (power, finance, time...etc) and the severe problems of gaining access.

4.4. Sampling, research instruments constructed and used

Theoretical sampling was employed. The four case study schools are selected to include schools with different levels of popularity. The popularity of Hong Kong schools may be understood as a changing continuum which emerges from the school choice process; schools are not formally categorised by pupil ability levels but they are informally perceived to belong to different bands according to the composition of their pupils (that is % of banding of student intake each year), as I have explained earlier in chapter 2. It therefore makes sense for the theoretical sampling to be based on schools from different (informal) bands, that is, with different levels of popularity, so that we can compare and contrast them.

Both the survey questionnaire and interview schedules were constructed according to the Hong Kong local policy context with reference to studies in Scotland (David et al 1986) with both closed and open-end questions.

The parental questionnaire in the survey is composed of two main parts (See Appendix B3). Part I is composed of four sections. Section I is about the Discretionary Places System (DP). Section II is about the Centrally Allocated Places System (CA). Section III is about the Appeal Mechanism. Section IV is about how satisfied parents were with their children's present school after one year on.

Both the survey and interviews were carried out after two pilot studies (mention of these will be given in detail in 4.5.) and amendments had been made, particularly with regard to the list of factors (See Appendix B3 questions 1.5 & 2.2) parents considered when choosing schools, as 'the list is usually incomplete' (Gorard a 1997: 47).

It is hoped that the use of multi-methods can help solve the problem of validity. However, readers should be informed that problems discovered with the questionnaire after the data collection stage mean that the researcher should handle the data produced with great care. I will discuss the validity of some of the results later.

Part II concerns the biographical data of the respondents. As the debate on school choice concerns equality of opportunities among students from different social class, the question of how to measure the socio-economic status of Hong Kong parents and their subsequent division into different groups has to be considered. Therefore, questions about respondents' education, qualifications, employment and income level are used in the questionnaire to measure parents' social-economic status.

However, during my pilot studies, I discovered that parents regard that employment (there has been high unemployment in Hong Kong in recent years due to the economic situation in Asia) and salary are their personal secret and so they have been unwilling to reveal any information on these two very sensitive questions. After revision, questions on qualifications and the educational level of parents remained in the questionnaire to obtain data on parents' social-economic status. However, similar to Carroll & Walford (1997:8), obtaining data on parents' qualifications also 'proved problematic'. I will discuss how I divided the parents into different groups in the next section.

Moreover, as the questionnaire was composed of two main parts with totally five sections of both closed and open-ended questions, it was considered to be too long and too time-consuming to complete. As the researcher aimed to collect sufficient data to answer the research questions and has tried her best to simplify it, it was regarded as acceptable. The readers may find the high response rate (65%---905 returned out of 1400 delivered) interesting.

A questionnaire that requires respondents to answer so many questions was obviously time-consuming but some respondents seemed to enjoy it and even spent more time in voicing their opinions and experiences with regard to the SSPA. Parental interviews were conducted after the survey and consent for participation was gained at the end of each parental questionnaire, rather than through the schools, in order to reduce bias in sampling.

Interview schedules (See Appendix C1, C2, C3) were constructed with the aim of obtaining more in-depth genuine opinions and experiences of parents, school administrators (3 Principals and 1 Delegate) and policy makers' toward the new SSPA. In addition, as my aim was not to apply the interview schedules too bureaucratically (Flick 1998) and to encourage the interviewee's openness, it was decided that all the questions and their sequence could be altered according to the context and their relevance to the respondent (Flick 1998). As Jones (1991) stated that the interviewer's personality and role can have a very complicated effect on the interview process, I had to be careful with the kind of relationship I established with the interviewee.

Furthermore, as my aim was to encourage the interviewee to talk freely and openly, I tried to establish and maintain a trustful, egalitarian relationship (Jones 1991). However, this was to prove difficult when interviewing one of the policy makers. I will discuss this later when looking at the difficulties encountered. Conducting telephone interviews with parents also had its drawbacks, as emotional clues from facial expressions and body language cannot be observed and studied. But since the researcher was the interviewer herself, she could still detect and record the respondents' feelings through their voices. Judgement of the quality of data that was collected can be made later.

Another issue of concern is the internal validity issue of interviews, but, as the researcher was the only one interviewer involved, there was no problem of consistency in this aspect. For the other possible sources of internal invalidity in the current research, I will talk about them in the later stages.

4.5. My empirical story, problems encountered and quality of the data

As Silverman stated (1985), the kind of approach a researcher has toward his/her interview data, has a direct bearing on the kind of reflexive account he/she has. I believe that a reflexive account of the whole process can uncover problems and therefore lead to a more careful and valid data collection and data analysis (Miles & Huberman 1994). Thus, in this section, the writer has aimed at producing an honest, critical and reflexive account of how the research was actually carried out and what kind of quality of data I have.

This enquiry is mainly composed of two phases (See table 4.2.). Phase I contains a parental survey, while Phase II includes the case study of four schools (detailed study of four schools with different level/degree of popularity, Band I, I-II, III.), interviews with school administrators (3 Principals and 1 Delegate), 12 parental interviews (three from each case study schools), interviews with the two policy makers and documentary (e.g. school homepages, newspaper reports, DP application forms) analysis were included for triangulation.

All the in-depth studies were used to investigate what had actually changed in terms of school choice and the consequences of these changes in the new arrangements.

Initially, letters and telephone calls of invitation were sent and made to all the secondary schools in one local district, Tai Po in Hong Kong. However, only 1 school gave its consent to the survey and the case study. Later, the researcher learned that student population in Tai Po had dropped tremendously and that schools were

busy competing for intake. Perhaps this was the reason that schools in Tai Po were reluctant to participate in this research.

As time was running out for the researcher, every attempt was made to gain access. Letters of invitation were revised and then sent to all the secondary schools in Hong Kong. In addition, emails, telephone invitations and personal contacts were employed to contact schools. Finally, 11 schools (cover single-sex school and co-ed schools) from 11 school districts (See table 4.3) gave their consent to participate in the survey, including 6 schools (2 band I, 1 band I-II, 3 band III schools) which gave their consent to the case study. None of them were among the few schools that changed into DSS schools in 2001-2, though the researcher has sent email, letter and made phone call of invitation. From the description of the difficult process of gaining access, it should be noted that the sampling here is what Gorard (a 1997:47) describes as opportunistic in nature and that researchers need to be cautious.

A further sampling problem was that, other than 1 band I-II school, there was no other band II schools which gave their consent. Originally, 1 band I school, 2 band II schools and 1 band III school were to be selected for the case study. In the event four schools: 1 band I, 1 band I-II, 2 band III schools were chosen from the 6 schools for case study.

Schools' bands were determined on the basis of the composition of pupils. At first, information on the banding of the six schools came from friends inside the ED/EMB (unfortunately, banding information about two schools was found to be incorrect later).

Later information was obtained from the schools themselves. This information was found to be more reliable, based on the overall percentage of banding of students allocated to the schools given by ED/EMB officially to the schools. However, the readers should be informed that, according to EMB, there was no banding of school in Hong Kong officially, the banding of school, we can say, is just a convenient way to classify schools of different popularity.

More than 1400 questionnaires with letters of invitation and consent forms were sent to form I parents through the 11 schools, which had given consent to the current research. 905 questionnaires were returned during the period April to July 2002, after students had been studying in secondary school for nearly a year. Though the 11 schools comprised three boys' schools, three girls' schools and five co-educational schools, it is found that among the 905 respondents (905 returned questionnaires), the number of respondents with a male child was nearly double that of respondents with a female child. This may affect the validity of some of the findings related to gender of child and parental choice.

After gaining consent for interviews from parents directly through the parental questionnaire, the researcher conducted the 12 parental telephone interviews to collect more in-depth qualitative data in February and March, 2003. The case study of four schools and face-to-face interviews with the policy makers were conducted during this period too. The Research diary and field notes were used as a device to note down unexpected issues (Miles & Huberman 1994). This device is believed to allow the checking of accuracy of information and also provides information for reflexive thinking afterwards.

Although the empirical qualitative data of four schools and 12 parents is a small number and I cannot generalise my findings for the whole of Hong Kong, it can still offer some rich, detailed pictures to complement the quantitative data from the 905 returned questionnaires. There are also many useful pieces of qualitative data from the open questions in the survey, which I will discuss later. All the interviews were recorded with the consent of interviewees and were transcribed.

School documents, for examples: school reports, meeting minutes, school brochures...etc, were analysed. University guidelines for the protection of research participants were followed. Confidentiality was guaranteed but all the information (interviews transcriptions, survey result and documents) are stored in a data bank. Reflexive self-criticism (Silverman 2000) was used to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. Thus the question of validity of data was often in the researcher's mind throughout the whole process of researching, data collecting, data entering and data analysis stages.

As mentioned in the previous section, there were some problems found with the data. The first problem was in the method of distribution. The parental questionnaire was delivered and collected through the 11 participating schools from 11 different school nets out of the total of 18 school nets in Hong Kong. It was considered as a convenient and efficient way to first contact, then to collect information from the parents. However, after the return of data and data entering stage, the researcher discovered two problems with this method.

First, the researcher had foreseen that misunderstandings of the link between researcher and school may occur and so had employed two measures to guarantee the confidentiality of the data given. One measure was to provide each questionnaire an envelope with the sign "Edinburgh University Parental Project" to seal the questionnaire. Another measure was to provide a covering letter with the questionnaire, clearly stating the independence of the researcher and that there was no link between the researcher and the school.

However, misunderstandings were still found in the returned questionnaires as a few respondents expected the researcher to change some of the policies in the school that they thought were not good. To a certain extent, this kind of misunderstanding may have affected some of the respondents' answers and thus may have affected the validity of the data provided. Fortunately, the number of such responses was small.

Another problem was the irrelevancy and inconsistency of some of the answers to one or two of the questions in the questionnaire. This may have been due to confusion over the wording or layout of the questions or perhaps it was due to the educational level of some of the respondents, or perhaps it was the respondents' intention to do so.

As for the former two reasons, the researcher had already carried out two pilot studies to ensure the validity of the instrument and data collected before the parental survey was conducted.

The first pilot study was conducted in 2001 in July with 20 questionnaires delivered to parent friends (who had engaged with the SSPA before) of the researcher and

which were subsequently returned. Some problems in the wording of questions and layout were found and amended. The second pilot study was conducted in December 2001 with 50 questionnaires delivered to Form One parents (the targeted population), collected and returned through three teacher friends of the researcher.

The problems found have to be taken into account when analysing some of the data in the questionnaire. The researcher bore in mind that just counting the frequencies and not assessing the relevance of the data is meaningless and may alter the research findings. Thus the weighting of evidence and validity of evidence were always in the researcher's mind during analysing stage. This point will be discussed along with some of the findings from the questionnaire at a later stage.

Regarding the problem of collecting information about parents' socio-economic status, as already predicted, only a few parents would give data on their qualifications and some (178, or 20% of the sample) were reluctant to give data even on their level of education. Fortunately, a significant number of parents did give data on their own education level (80%) or on that of their partner (69%) (See tables 4.5 & 4.6). With this crucial data, I therefore managed to create an aggregate measure of parental education based on the higher education level of the two parents (See table 4.7).

Unfortunately, the national figures do not give information about student/parent's socio-economic status/background. Therefore I cannot compare my results with the national figures.

Table 4.3 Sampling: Eleven schools from eleven school nets in H. K.

<i>Schools with different degree/level of popularity</i>	<i>Number of schools</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Band I</i>	4	463	51.2
<i>Band II</i>	3	247	27.3
<i>Band III</i>	4	195	21.5
<i>Total</i>	11	905	100

As mentioned previously, through the 11 schools from 11 different school nets (See table 4.3 above), around 1400 questionnaires were delivered and 905 answered questionnaires returned (a total of 910 returned questionnaires, with 5 blanks found). Again, it could be expected that the same person who actually filled in the School Choice Form and chose a school for his/her child in 2001 filled in the questionnaire (See table 4.4 below).

Table 4.4. Identity of the respondents

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
<i>Mother</i>	639	75.8
<i>Father</i>	190	22.5
<i>Male guardian</i>	5	0.6
<i>Female guardian</i>	7	0.8
<i>Others</i>	2	0.2
<i>Total</i>	843	100
<i>Missing (0)</i>	62	
<i>Total questionnaire</i>	905	

However, during the parental interviews, it was found that in one case, due to the illiteracy of the parent, it was the student in the household who completed both the parental questionnaire and the School Choice Form, instead of her parent. After double-checking the data, it was found that only a very few respondents and their

partners (723 out of 905 willing to answer the educational level question, among the 723 who answered this question, 4 respondents and 3 of the respondents' partners reported without education) reported that they had no education at all.

Table 4.5. Education level of Respondents

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
<i>No education</i>	4	
<i>Primary</i>	171	23.7%
<i>Secondary</i>	438	60.6%
<i>Secondary 6-7, university graduate, postgraduate</i>	114	15.8%
<i>Total</i>	727	100.0
<i>Missing data</i>	178	
<i>Total</i>	905	

For this group of respondents, though the researcher had no way to know how they managed to reply in the parental questionnaire, or it is reasonable to think that a family member, filled in the School Choice Form for them. Luckily, after I aggregate the household education level, only one family with both parents have no education at all (See tables 4.5, 4.6 & 4.7).

Table 4.6. Education level of Respondent's partner

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
<i>No education</i>	3	
<i>Primary</i>	162	25.8%
<i>Secondary</i>	352	56.1%
<i>Secondary 6-7, university graduate, postgraduate</i>	114	18.2%
<i>Total</i>	631	100.0
<i>Missing data (0)</i>	274	
<i>Total</i>	905	

Furthermore, I am still not sure if only one parent or both parents made the school choice making decision. From table 4.4, 639 respondents are the mothers and 190 are

the fathers. From table 4.7, one can find that the biggest group lies in the secondary sector, (61%). The primary sector consists of 16% and the group that includes secondary 6-7 to postgraduate is 24%.

Table 4.7. Respondents' household (aggregate) education level

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
<i>No education</i>	1	
<i>Primary</i>	113	15.5%
<i>Secondary</i>	444	60.8%
<i>Secondary 6-7, university graduate, postgraduate</i>	173	23.7%
<i>Total</i>	731	100.0
<i>Missing data (0)</i>	174	
<i>Total</i>	905	

From the three tables above, we can see some of the characteristics of the survey respondents, their education level, their gender and their identity.

Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that some parents even used the blank space in the questionnaire to express their opinion. Thus, lots of rich qualitative data can also be found in the questionnaire. This kind of eagerness in answering questionnaires came as something of a surprise to the researcher. As already mentioned with regard to the research instruments used, completing a five sections long questionnaire is a very time-consuming task, but most parents took the time to complete it. Another aspect of parents' eagerness to express their views can be shown in the uncommonly high return rate - 64.6%, being 905 returned out of around 1400 delivered.

Of course, one could argue that the high return rate might be due to the misunderstanding of the link between the school and the researcher. Whatever the

case, the researcher had already acknowledged and predicted the problem beforehand and had already done all she could to avoid the misunderstanding of the link in this project. From the eagerness of the parents' response to the open questions, the researcher believes that the questionnaire, to some extent, at least, acted as a channel that parents used to voice their opinions on the policy and the education reforms in Hong Kong. It has to be noted that a few respondents (not more than five) also commented on the time-consuming aspect of the questionnaire, while a few respondents expressed their appreciation of the questionnaire and this project.

Four schools, 2 EMI (English as Medium of Instruction) band I schools (one later become band I-II) and 2 CMI (Chinese as Medium of Instruction) band III schools, were selected for the case study. The differentiation of EMI and CMI, as noted in the background chapter, is due to the difference of language being used as the medium of instruction in junior secondary schools years, from Form I to Form III.

Due to the heavy workload of the Principals, only one face-to-face semi-structured interview was conducted in each school in Cantonese. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee and transcribed and translated into English. The time period with Principals varied from 1 hour to three hours, depending on the time available of each Principal and the eagerness of the Principal to share his/her personal views on the SSPA and on the various education reforms in Hong Kong. The Principal in CMI1 is new this year and, therefore, an administrative staff member was appointed by the Principal to be interviewed by the researcher. This particular staff member was a bit reserved and his interview was the shortest I conducted.

Another school Principal, in School CMI2, was very eager to talk and took every chance to promote the school and, so, the time taken on this interview was the longest. In fact, this Principal was very positive about the education reforms in Hong Kong. The reputation of the school had been very bad in the past, but the Principal stated, in the four years he has been in the post, has inspired a significant improvement.

The views of Principals are important to the present study, but the researcher also acknowledged she should treat data from Principals with caution and with a critical stance. It is because Principals may attempt to justify their positions. Thus the readers will be informed how information from Principals was triangulated with other sources in finding chapter 6. More information on this is shown in the findings later. In general, then, the interview relationships were informal and friendly. All the data needed from schools for this project were collected on the day of the interview or received later by email and by post.

Out of the 905 returned questionnaires, 99 (10.9%) parents from eleven school districts gave their consent and their contact phone number for the telephone interview in their returned questionnaires. 12 parents, 3 from each of the four case study schools, were then selected for telephone interviews with the aim of comparing parents' participation and experience in DP. Thus, the criteria for the selection of the 12 parents was based mainly on whether they participated in DP or not, and whether they were successful in their choice of school or not.

After selection, the researcher also met problems when some parents refused to participate in the telephone interview though they had given their consent in the questionnaire. However, the problem was a minor one and was resolved promptly.

Finally, after re-selection, 12 parental telephone interviews (Table 4.8) were conducted in Cantonese in February-March 03. Again, they were all recorded with the consent of the respondents, then transcribed and translated into English. The duration of telephone interview ranged from around 20 minutes to 1.5 hrs. The time difference depended on the eagerness of the interviewees to share their experiences with the interviewer, on the time availability of the interviewee and on the uncontrollable telephone interview context...etc.

The interview schedule was semi-structured. Overall, the interview relationships were friendly and relaxed, as it was the parents' wish to be interviewed, and there was no compulsion on the part of the school to take part. Again, two parents asked about the role of the interviewer and whether she had any link with the school. Such frank enquiry from parents was a good thing as the interviewer could take the chance to explain that she had no link to the school and that the confidentiality of parents' answers in the parental questionnaire was assured.

Besides the data from parents and from the four case study schools, two policy makers, one officer (delegated by Mrs Fanny Law, the Permanent Secretary of EMB in 2003) from the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and one from the former Education Commission (EC) committee, (who was one of the three main advocates who led the education reform in Hong Kong and participated in the Education Blue

Print proposal), were also interviewed regarding their perspectives on the changes in school and the impact on parents regarding the changes in the SSPA and the reforms.

The interview relationships were friendly but unequal. Being a student researcher facing a high-ranking official in the government made the interview understandably unbalanced in terms of power. This became immediately obvious when the policy maker from EMB asked, 'Are you the student researcher?' The readers need to appreciate the difficulties of obtaining answers from this high-ranking officer during the limited one-hour period assigned by the officer. Regarding the validity of the qualitative data collected, the researcher had to decide whether each piece of interview data be treated as giving direct access to 'experience' or as actively constructed 'narratives' (Silverman 2000).

Silverman (2000) has suggested that the realism and narrative approaches should be used to analyse interview data. In general, according to the evidence of my observation and my interview diary (field notes), I know that most of my interviewees trusted me and opened up to share their personal experiences with me. However, the researcher also realises that some of the data should be regarded with caution. Interview data from Principals and delegates is one example and how the researcher validates the information given will be presented in the finding chapters.

The following table shows the characteristics of the 12 interview respondents in the four case study schools:

Table 4.8. Characteristics of the 12 interview respondents from the four case study schools (3 parents from each school)

	<i>EMI1</i>	<i>EMI2</i>	<i>CMI1</i>	<i>CMI2</i>
Respondent s	1. Mother 2. Mother 3. Father	1. Mother 2. Mother 3. Mother	1. Mother 2. Mother 3. Mother	1. Father 2. Mother 3. Mother
Education level	1. Secondary 2. Secondary 3. Secondary	1. Secondary 2. Secondary 3. Secondary	1. Secondary 2. Secondary 3. Secondary	1. Primary 2. Primary 3.?
Present School place and choice (31st choice means did not choose the school)	1.CP 1st 2.CP 2nd 3.DP	1.CP 2 nd 2.CP 11th 3.CP 1st	1.Find own one 2.CP 31st 3.Find own one (can not accept 29 th choice)	1.CP 31st 2.CP 20th 3.CP 31st
Participate in DP (If second chance, will you choose the same or different?)	1.Yes but failed (will choose same) 2.Yes but failed (will choose same) 3.Yes got the school	1.No 2.Yes but failed (will choose same) 3.Yes but failed (will choose same)	1.No 2.No 3.Yes (will choose differently)	1.Yes but failed (?) 2. Yes but failed (will choose the same) 3. Yes but failed (will choose the same)
Appeal	1.No 2.No 3.No	1.No 2.Yes but failed 3. No	1. No 2. Can not accept but no appeal 3.No	1.Yes but failed 2. Yes but failed 3. Yes but failed
Change school?	1. No 2. No 3. No	1. No 2. No 3. No	1. Parent wanted , but child disagreed 2.Yes, will try 3.No	1. Yes, but can not afford 2.? 3.?

Two approaches were used to analyse interview data. Firstly, the thematic approach was used. After the transcription and translation process, the researcher re-read the transcriptions until all the main themes were identified. Secondly, a comparative method was employed to understand the factors associated with similarities and differences.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data presented later in the Findings chapters aimed at giving a more in-depth view on schools in competition with each other, and on conflicts faced by accountable school managers and on the responses from the policy makers. However, in the next section, we need to summarise all the limitations of the present research, while issues of interpretation need to be addressed also.

4.6. Limitations and issues of validity and reliability

While reading through the empirical story and evidence, one may agree with the saying that ‘doing research is in no way a tidy enterprise but a messy one’. Furthermore, data collection through survey and interview seems simple and straightforward. However, as Silverman (1985, 2000) states, one cannot simply take the face value of the data, but, instead, one has to be reflexive in preparation, both during and after the data collection, about what may have affected the data obtained. So, in this section, before I present our findings, I aim to sum up all the limitations and will, hopefully, inform the readers of this in a reflexive, honest and objective way.

There are lots of limitations in this research on the impact of the secondary school choice SSPA policy. Firstly, other policies complicated the matter. Originally, the researcher just wanted to investigate the impact of the SSPA on parents and schools. However, this was found to be impossible at a later stage of the research process. The researcher discovered that it was difficult to disentangle the effect of concurrent policy changes, as the cause and effect, or pattern, may not be linear but multi-dimensional.

This is sometimes caused by the impact of other policies such as DSS, language (MOI) policy, SMI and Quality Education...etc in Hong Kong. This is what Johnson (1990:119) said in her research of parental choice in the UK:

When we look at the effect of a policy for parental choice on schools it is, as with the effect on sub-systems of education, difficult to separate one effect of the Reform Act from another. The introduction of local management of finance immediately causes schools to look at one another in a different way...Assisted Place...we can see examples of how maintained and independent schools related to one another in a competitive situation...

Secondly, the researcher could not ignore the time factor, as 1999-2001 SSPA cycle was the first stage of the reformed school choice policy. On the one hand, schools were found to be in the early, experimental stage of trying different strategies in order to attract more students. Thus, this thesis should be cautious in making claims to assess impact as the effects and consequences of impact and diversity may not emerge very quickly. Therefore, I may be able to track the early impact, to measure perceptions of impact, and possibly to measure short-term changes in the distribution of students across schools; but the time scale is too short for a full impact assessment.

Thirdly, theoretical sampling according to the popularity/banding of schools is merely one aspect to be considered. Another aspect to think about is that different individual schools have their own history, characteristics, educational philosophies and strategies. The case study of four schools can give us some idea of the four particular schools, but whether the four schools are representative of other schools from the same band (similar degree/level of popularity) is still questionable.

Another issue that may affect the validity of the findings related to gender and parental choice is the composition of the sample of the case study schools: the fact that a single-sex boys' school (the most popular one) was included in the sample, while a single-sex girls' school was not (Remarks: Survey sample of parents is different from sample of the four case study schools).

Furthermore, regarding the data obtained from a handful of self-selection schools, the researcher must be cautious that the schools may have hidden agenda participating in this research and thus may not provide the truthful account of the school. Thus for the interview data from the four administrators, the account they gave have to be treated carefully and have to be triangulated with other data.

Fourthly, research design is limited by the problem of access. As I only have four case study schools, generalisation must be taken cautiously.

Fifthly, again, is the sampling problem caused by the problem of access. As only 11 out of a total number of 400 secondary schools participated in the school choice parental survey, a question regarding the problem of sampling surfaces. 'How representative is the result, even though 905 questionnaires have been returned?'

Nevertheless, I can at least be satisfied that the 11 schools are from 11 different school nets out of a total of 18 school nets in Hong Kong. So, looking at it in this way, one could say that I have covered a fairly wide representation of what is a very complex Hong Kong market. The problem now is: 'How many claims can I make from such a representation?'

Sixthly although, as mentioned in section 4.5, the 11 schools cover single-sex and co-ed schools, it is found that among the 905 respondents, nearly twice as many had a male child as had a female child. This too may affect the validity of some of the findings related to gender of child and school choice.

Lastly, in order to measure whether the policy caused social segregation, large-scale and longitudinal studies of school intakes before 2001 and after were required. That is, ten or more years of official statistical data of the social composition of students in different schools would be useful in collecting more concrete evidence. However, in the present study, a longitudinal approach is not feasible for a PhD study, given the limited 3-5 year period available. However, the present data do provide some evidence of the changes in intakes of our four case study schools in three years time (2001-2003).

With all these limitations in mind, the writer acknowledges the importance of the issues of validity and reliability of her empirical evidence. She also acknowledges that the way in which she uses the data as evidence, as well as the issue of interpretation, are very important issues.

However, she must bring her own judgement on the data, without necessarily taking it at face value. Moreover, she must weigh each piece of evidence with triangulation before any conclusions can be drawn and be cautious regarding all the limitations of the current research. Lastly, since this is a research on early impact and equality of opportunities of the school choice policy, the researcher needs to keep at a critical distance and be reflexive at all times. Hopefully, reflexivity and objectivity can be achieved.

Chapter 5 Parental choice in Hong Kong

5.1. Introduction

The findings surrounding the main research question and research sub-questions will be presented in the following chapters 5-7. The findings will be presented in raw data form by themes with a few relevant comments attached.

The main focus of this chapter is on the early impact of the choice policy on parents (on the demand side). I will present the quantitative evidence (905 cases- using both open and closed questions) and the qualitative evidence (12 parental interviews and documentary analysis) side-by-side. The presentation of the main themes found will be presented in nine sections. To begin with, in section 5.2, I will analyse parental preference and the kind of competition for school places in the Hong Kong context. This also includes an analysis of the demand for co-ed or single sex education in the Hong Kong society.

In 5.3 I will present the findings on the impact of the new SSPA in 2001. In addition, the confusion caused by the abrupt change of the SSPA, as well as the feelings of parents on hearing the results of their applications will also be presented.

Then, since the main focus of this dissertation is on the equality of opportunities issue of school choice, I will also examine the two prerequisites of informed rational choice: that is, (1) information regarding the making of a rational choice and (2) the

ability to make a rational choice of different groups of parents. Thus, in 5.4, I will present the findings concerning sources of information, types of information and the differences in information different groups of parents have.

I will also present the problem of the transparency of selection criteria in DP schools in 2001. The data on the link between information and success, the kind of skills needed for parents in choosing schools within the Hong Kong school system and the matching of banding of child with a particular school will also be examined. All the findings will focus on information regarding different groups of parents, including different educational groups and parents with child of different gender. In 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, I will present the choice barriers, DP participation, skills, abilities, success and the issue of equality of opportunities different groups of parents have.

In 5.8, I will present the findings surrounding the number of appeal cases, the success and failure of parents in the appeal mechanism in that particular year. In 5.9, I will look at the end-product and the perceived satisfaction of different groups of parents regarding their children's present schools a year further on in time. The themes include parents' satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) about their children's present schools, whether they want to change schools and whether there are any barriers/difficulties for parents to change school if they do not like the school.

5.2. Parental preference, choice availability and vertical competition

As advocates of the choice policy claim that parents can act as consumers in shopping around and choosing what they want, the issues surrounding real choice and increased choice were the two main themes examined here.

In the survey, parents were asked two separate 'open' questions: why did they choose the DP school and: what was the most important criterion in ranking schools in the CA? Their responses have been coded into the categories shown in table 5.1.

Firstly, it is interesting to note that parents' answers to this open question include 'more chance and possibility' and 'computer lottery decides everything'. Some parents mentioned 'more chance and possibility' as the most important factor in ranking schools in the CA, suggesting that some parents could be very calculative and had a strategy to encash their right of choice. On the contrary some parents mentioned that the 'computer lottery decides everything' in the CA, suggesting that they felt rather powerless to choose.

Secondly, it is interesting to note that some parents regarded the advice of others such as primary school staff, family and friends as the most important factors. It seems that these parents may have just relied on others' advice but not had their own analysis and judgement of how to use the information they collected. This group of parents may have lacked the knowledge or ability to do so, though they are not the main groups of parents.

Thirdly, factors such as the physical environment of the school, a wider choice of subjects, more extra-curricular activities, religious affiliation, school tradition, and whether the school was single-sex or co-educational were not the main considerations of most of Hong Kong parents in making school choice. I discuss the methodological issues which may affect the findings about preferences for single-sex and co-educational schools later in section 5.2.

Table 5.1. The most important factor in choosing a DP school and in ranking CA schools (answers to the two open questions with frequencies & %)

<i>DP Most important factor</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>CA Most important factor</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
School ethos	143	28.3	School ethos	138	25.3
Proximity	83	16.4	Match my child-academic band	108	19.8
EMI	37	7.3	Band of school	69	12.7
Band of school	33	6.5	Advice from primary school	31	5.7
Good education	30	6.5	EMI	30	5.5
Match my child-academic band	28	5.5	Proximity	29	5
Sibling(s) in school	21	4.2	*More possibility & Chance	23	4.2
Good teaching staff & principal	20	4	*Computer lottery decide, not me	22	4
My child like the school	18	3.6	Good education	14	2.6
Good future prospect	18	3.6	My child decides	13	2.4
Famous/popular	16	3.2	Famous/popular	15	2.8
Advice from primary school	14	2.8	Good future prospect	10	1.8
Religious affiliation	13	2.6	Good teaching staff & principal	9	1.7
School tradition	9	1.8	School tradition	9	1.7
Ease of traffic	5	1	Ease of traffic	8	1.5
Single sex education	4	0.8	Nice environment	3	0.6
Advice from family & friends	3	0.6	Sibling in school	2	0.4
Wide subject choice and extra-curricula activities	2	0.4	Advice from family & friends	2	0.4
*Try to avoid worst school	1	0.2	Single sex education	1	0.2
Nice environment	1	0.2	Wide subject choice and extra-curricula activities	1	0.2
Co-education	1	0.2	Religious affiliation	1	0.2

*Special, not found in the other column

Fourthly, good discipline and a good school ethos were seen as the most important. However, good discipline and a good school ethos in Hong Kong are often associated with band I schools, while band III schools have a reputation often

associated with bad school discipline and a bad school ethos. It is interesting to note that, in DP applications, among all the respondents, only one parent considered avoiding the worst school as the most important factor.

Lastly, it is interesting to note that most of the parents who referred to matching their child to the school as the most important factor, most parents described this match in terms of academic aspects (banding), but not other aspects such as talent or the school's social environment. Only very few parents considered these other aspects in the survey (See table 5.1).

Besides the open questions about the most important criterion in DP and CA, I also asked parents two sets of 'closed' questions to pick 5 important factors and rank these factors in terms of importance (scale 1-5, 1 is the most important) for triangulation. After I compare the means and modes of the rank 5 results, I then found out the 5 most important factors that parents considered in choosing DP and ranking in CA. The findings in the open question are thus triangulated with the closed questions (See tables 5.2 & 5.3).

It is interesting to note that the factors for DP and CA are very similar in that factor such as school ethos, band of the school, proximity, good education and EMI are common factors. Parents often rank school ethos and EMI first. They often rank good education and band of schools (that is: popularity level of schools) second or third (See all the modes listed in table 5.3).

The list of factors indicate that the competition for schools is primarily vertical rather than horizontal (See tables 5.2 & 5.3). The findings are similar to the shifting around

pattern and the type of competition I mentioned in chapter 2. Vertical competition is based on choice from a hierarchy of schools defined by academic level or status, while horizontal competition is based on choice among schools with diverse characteristics or specialisms that are not hierarchically ordered. This can be seen when I add up the numbers for good school ethos, bands, EMI and good education and compare them with proximity and matching. Furthermore, as mentioned above, in answering to the open question parents often refer to matching students to school academically.

Table 5.2. Pick five most important factors in the choice of DP and CA schools (closed question with picked frequencies and %)

<i>DP</i> (frequencies & %)	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>CA</i> (frequencies & %)	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
1 School ethos	430	75	1 School ethos	625	75
2 Band of school	267	47	2 Band of schools	412	49
3 EMI school	258	45	3 Proximity	366	44
4 Proximity	248	43	4 Ease of Traffic	321	38
5 Good education	225	39	5 Good Education	320	38
			6 EMI School	311	34
Total	571	100	Total	836	100

Table 5.3. Rank the five most important factors in the choice of DP and CA schools (with rank frequency, mean and mode)

<i>DP</i>	<i>Rank frequency</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>CA</i>	<i>Rank frequency</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mode</i>
1 School ethos	406	2.31	1	1 School ethos	595	2.25	1
2 Band of school	251	2.34	2	2 Band of schools	389	2.33	2
3 EMI school	246	2.59	1	3 Proximity	336	3.17	5
4 Proximity	239	3.07	5	4. Good Education	309	2.72	2
5. Good education	227	2.74	3	5. EMI School	301	2.62	1
6. Ease of traffic	161	3.71	5	6. Ease of Traffic	284	3.73	5

*After comparing the means and modes of the rank 5 result, the frequencies of the top five/six are listed.

In the open question concerning the reasons why parents choose a particular DP school, many of them also said that they wanted the school because of academic level and content (Band, good education, EMI, high university entrance rate). In both the survey and interviews with parents, it was confirmed that the university entrance rate was also a very important criterion besides the five most important criteria I listed above, as many parents regard university education is the main aim of secondary schooling. One parent told us his main criteria:

The main criteria are their rate of university entrance and their history of success in HKCEE and A level... our aim after secondary schooling is university education.

In the interviews with parents, I have more evidence that parents value the EMI schools more than CMI schools. One parent worried so much that she planned a few years ahead to get an EMI place for her son:

I wanted him to get into an EMI School. The reason is that traditionally English is very important. Chinese is not OK. I worried a lot at that time. I was very concerned about it... My English is not good. I don't know English. But I started to learn English myself and then taught my son. I helped him in his dictation. I started to help when he was in Primary four... Luckily he got a place. I have tried hard to think how to help with his English. If his English were not good enough he would not get into an EMI. I worried a lot at that time. I was very nervous at that time... There was no other factor, only EMI. Every country uses English... English is very important.

In the interviews with parents, parents confirmed that their main concerns were about their children's future life chances. Their preference for EMI Schools was a bigger priority than proximity and a bigger campus:

I think so. I myself found a job. They always required me to know English. English is the top priority, no matter what kind of job I applied for. They may not require Mandarin, but they require English and Cantonese... I visited X (EMI1) and found that the environment was not

OK, very small. But as long as it's an EMI school, I think it's better...I don't care whether it's near or not. It's not important. The most important is it's an EMI school. I just listened to other people's advice. A few parents who have children study in X. They told me that in XX there was another school that is not as good as X. I then tried my best to help my son to get a place in X.

Another parent also expressed that English is a very important factor in finding a job.

An EMI School is her aim for her son:

You listen to me...(inaudible). Now people in Peking speak beautiful English, I hope my son can study in English school...It's because you can learn lots of things in an English school. When you find a job, they all require English. If Western people want to invest in Hong Kong and you don't know English, it's no use.

A few parents in the interview also related their view on the importance of EMI education to their own experience in job searching. One parent said that 'Even I found job in a restaurant, they asked me whether I know English or not.'

Table 5.4. Naming each factor as important, by parental educational level

<i>Parental education level</i>	<i>Primary</i>		<i>Secondary</i>		<i>Secondary 6 and above (include postgraduate)</i>	
	<i>DP</i>	<i>CA</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>CA</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>CA</i>
<i>School ethos</i>	60%	62.5%	80%	80%	78%	83.5%
<i>School bands</i>	38%	45%	47%	47%	51%	63%
<i>Proximity</i>	45%	50%	41%	45%	42.5%	33%
<i>Ease of traffic</i>	34%	44%	30%	38%	31%	31.5%
<i>Good education</i>	32%	39%	42%	38%	39%	39%
<i>EMI school</i>	36%	20%	47%	37.5%	56%	52%

Furthermore, as I was interested in finding out whether groups of parents with different educational backgrounds have different preferences, I cross-tabulated the 6 factors with different educational groups and found the following results (See tables, 5.4, 5.5 & 5.6):

Table 5.5. Whether chosen DP school was inside/outside local school net, by parental educational level

<i>Discretionary school application</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Secondary 6 and above (including postgraduate)</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Outside local school net</i>	12.5%	25.5%	31.5%	26%
<i>Inside local school net</i>	87.5%	74.5%	68.5%	74%
<i>Total</i>	56	294	130	480

Chi square:7.449, df.2, $p < 0.05$

Table 5.6. Present school inside or outside local school net by parental educational level

<i>Respondent child</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Secondary 6 and above (including postgraduate)</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Outside local school net</i>	23%	27%	39%	29%
<i>Inside local school net</i>	77%	73%	61%	71%
<i>Total</i>	99	412	168	679

Chi square: 10.016, df.2, $p < 0.01$

Regarding the DP, firstly, parents with the lowest education level thought that school ethos was not as important as the other groups of parents. Secondly, I find that the link between parents' education and their regard of band was an important factor. I find that the higher the educational background of parents is, the more they regard school bands as being important. Thirdly, I find that the lower the educational background of parents is, the higher they regard proximity as being an important factor. Fourthly, I also find that the higher the education of parents is, the more they regard the provision of a good education at school as being important. Lastly, I also

find that the higher the educational level of parents, the more they regard attendance at an EMI school as being an important factor.

For the most important factors in CA, firstly, parents with the lowest education level think that school ethos is not as important as the other groups of parents. Secondly, I find there is a link between parents' education and their regard of band as being an important factor. I find that the more the education of parents, the more they regard the school band as important. This may be due to the fact that the matching of band with the school is highly significant in the success levels of the CA.

Thirdly, it is interesting to note that the higher the educational level of parents, the less likely they were to regard proximity as important. This may also be affected by the economic situation of parents as they can afford the transportation fee. And thus distance is considered not as important as other factors to the higher educational group of parents. This, however, may also reflect greater knowledge of more distant schools. Table 5.5 shows that the higher the educational level of parents, the more likely they were to apply to a DP school outside their local school net; the association is statistically significant. Furthermore, table 5.6 shows that the higher the educational level of parents, the more likely their children were to get into a school outside their local school net; this association is also statistically significant.

Fourthly, regarding the provision of a good education by schools, I can not really find a link between the educational background of parents and the demand for this factor.

Fifthly, with regard to the EMI factor, I can say that there is definitely a positive link: the more the education of parents, the more they demand EMI as a factor.

In short, from the above findings, I found that the better educated the parents are, the more substantially they are influenced by considerations of ‘academic’ level or content (Band, good education, EMI).

Besides being interested in choice preference of different educational groups, I am also interested in how parents with child of different sex make their choice of school (See tables 5.7, 5.8 & 5.9). The readers need to be informed that, due to the theoretical sampling strategy (based on the degree of popularity of schools), the fact that a boys’ only school is included in the sample of the case study schools while a girls’ only school is not, may affect the validity of the case-study findings related to gender and parental choice. This does not affect the findings of the current analysis which is based on a survey of parents in 11 schools which included three boys-only and three girls-only schools. However, nearly two-thirds of the respondents were parents of male children. This suggests that the biases associated with responding to the survey may have been different for parents of male and female children. Comparisons based on the child’s gender therefore needed to be interpreted with caution, although it is difficult to estimate the likely nature or extent of any bias.

Table 5.7 Choosing co-education or single-sex as an important factor for Hong Kong parents

<i>Important factor</i>	<i>DP</i>		<i>CA</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Co-ed.</i>	42	7.4	71	8.5
<i>Single-sex ed.</i>	72	12.6	82	9.8

Generally, most Hong Kong parents do not regard co-educational or single-sex education as an important factor (See tables 5.7 & 5.8).

Table 5.8. The most Important factor by child gender (open question)

<i>Most important factor/Gender of child</i>	<i>DP (% within child sex)</i>		<i>CA (% within child sex)</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>School ethos</i>	28.2	30.3	24.9	27.1
<i>Proximity</i>	14.9	18.8	4.7	6
<i>School bands</i>	11.1	15.2	12.7	12.1
<i>Good education</i>	10.7	7.2	4.5	3
<i>EMI school</i>	8.2	6.1	6.8	3.5
<i>Future career and education prospect</i>	4.7	1.8	2.4	1
<i>Ease of traffic</i>	0	3	1.8	1
<i>Single sex ed.</i>	0.9	0.6	0.3	0
<i>Co-ed.</i>	0.3	0	0	0

* this table summarised 2 tables (both are statistically not significant)

Table 5.9 Picked five most Important factors by child gender (closed question)

<i>Most important factor/Gender of child</i>	<i>DP (% within child sex)</i>		<i>CA (% within child sex)</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>School ethos</i>	77.6	73.3	75.6	76.2
<i>EMI school</i>	50.1	39	40.9	31.5
<i>School bands</i>	44.8	52.1	49.3	49.8
<i>Good education</i>	41.6	36.4	38.8	37.3
<i>Proximity</i>	40.1	46.5	42.2	44.3
<i>Ease of traffic</i>	33.1	29.8	33.1	29.8
<i>Future career and education prospect</i>	28	35	28	34
<i>Single sex ed.</i>	15	7.5	12.2	4.8
<i>Co-ed</i>	7.4	7.5	8.1	9.2

*this table summarised 18 small tables

When I cross-tabulated the most important factors named by parents with children of different genders (See table 5.9 above), I found the following: firstly, parents with child of both genders all regard school ethos as the most important factor. Secondly,

for EMI education, it seems that parents with male child regard it as more important. Thirdly, regarding school bands, it is interesting to note that for DP school, parents with female child regard it as more important when compared with parents with male child. Fourthly, for DP choice, parents with male child regard good education, as important factor is slightly higher than that of parent with female child. Fifthly, it is interesting to note that, parents with female child regard proximity as the most important factor is higher in both DP and CA than parents with male child.

Table 5.10 Choose DP school locally or not by child gender

<i>DP school</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>
<i>Inside local school net</i>	71.7	80.2
<i>Outside local school net</i>	28.3	19.8

Chi square:4.826, df:1, $p<.05$

Table 5.11 Present school outside or inside local school net by child gender

<i>Present school</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>
<i>Inside local school net</i>	72.2	80.8
<i>Outside local school net</i>	27.8	19.2

Chi square:7.143, df:1, $p<.01$

Fifthly, it amazed the researcher that more parents with a female child regard future career and education prospects as an important factor than parents with a male child in both the DP and the CA.

Lastly, as mentioned before, very few Hong Kong parents regard single-sex or co-education as an important factor. However, parents with a male child seem regard

single-sex education as more important than parents with female child in both DP and CA (See tables above). The demand for single-sex education in CA for male student double (or more than double) that for female students. From the findings in the above tables, to a certain extent, there is not much difference in the criteria for parents in choosing schools, no matter whether they have male child or female child. Though, regarding EMI education, parents with male child regard it as more important while parents with female child regard future career and education prospect as more important. I can say, parents with male or female child, are similar, both regard academic vertical criteria as important. Again, due to the theoretical sampling strategy (based on the degree of popularity of schools), the fact that a boys' only school is included in the sample of the case study schools while a girls' only school is not, may affect the validity of the case-study findings related to gender and parental choice. This does not affect the findings of the current analysis which is based on a survey of parents in 11 schools which included three boys-only, three girls-only schools and five co-educational schools.

From the findings in the above tables, to a certain extent, there is not much difference in the criteria for parents in choosing schools, no matter whether they have male child or female child. Though, regarding EMI education, parents with male child regard it as more important while parents with female child regard future career and education prospect as more important. I can say, parents with male or female child, are similar, both regard academic vertical criteria as important.

In short, after the analysis of gender and social class differences, regarding the issue of choice availability and parental preference, I found that in Hong Kong, the

favoured school choice is for vertical competition where parents compete seriously for band I EMI schools. As regards parents, the matching of students to schools, to a greater extent, concerns the matching of bands academically, rather than with concerns about the variety of schools with different curricula or with those schools that specialise in music/sport or that have differentiated teaching methods. And parents with male or female child, are similar, both regard academic vertical criteria as important.

For choice availability, the readers need to be informed that band I and band II schools are unevenly distributed throughout the 18 Hong Kong school nets. It is possible, therefore, that there are not enough band I schools available for band I students to choose from in some areas. Though in the case study schools, the two band I administrators stated that there are a good proportion of band I schools in their school net.

5.3. Choice results and experience of different groups of parents

The result of the 1999-2001 cycle of SSPA was announced on 17/7/01. A reporter (17/7/01 Ming Pao Newspaper) stated that it had broken the SSPA record that had stood for the past 23 years in that 56% achieved their first choice and 73% achieved one of their first three choices. The ED Official stated that the reason for this might have been due to the increase in DP from 10% to 20%.

However, it was also reported (17/7/01 Ming Pao Newspaper) that three band I students in one primary school in Wong Tai Sin did not get band I school places, but were allocated to band II and band III schools. It was also reported (17/7/01 Hong

Kong Economic Journal) that some schools discovered that a number of good achievers and poor achievers were allocated to the same school. They believed that this was due to the cutting of bands from 5 to 3, and that the luck and random factor had increased tremendously in that year. It was also revealed (21/7/01 Sing Tao Newspaper) that appeal cases rose to 7,722. Most of the appeal cases were centred in Shatin, Tai Po and Kwan Tong.

When comparing the results of my survey with the national figures (E.D. Report on SSPA 1999-2001 cycle), I can identify the following findings (See table 5.12 below). In my survey, the chances of securing one of the first three choices is lower than the national figure reported by the ED, while the result of 'residual allocation' in my survey is much higher than that of the national figures reported by the ED.

Table 5.12. Comparison of national figure and my survey

<i>1999/2001 SSPA</i>	<i>My survey</i>	<i>National figure</i>
<i>Allocation according to student's first three choices</i>	66.58%	73.95%
<i>Residual Allocation (i.e. none of students own choices was successful)</i>	7.8%	2.69%

Although I do not know the precise reason for the discrepancy between my figure and the national figure, possible explanation is the non-response bias to the survey; that is, dissatisfied and unsuccessful parents are more likely to participate in my survey. Or the discrepancy could reflect the way the official statistics have been calculated. However, I do not have sufficient knowledge to confirm which factor is the most valid in explaining this discrepancy.

Table 5.13 Choice outcome by child gender

Choice outcome	Male (%within child sex)		Female (%within child sex)	
	F	%	F	%
1-5	406	75.6	205	73.7
6-27	67	12.5	53	19.1
28-30	4	.7	1	0.4
31, did not choose the school	52	9.7	17	6.1
Others: move house...etc.	8	1.5	2	0.7
Total	537	100	278	100

Chi-square:9.568, df.4, $p < 0.05$ (statistically significant)

Table 5.14 Present school place by child gender

Present school place	Male (% within child sex)		Female (% within child sex)	
	F	%	F	%
Through DP	46	8.3	24	8.4
Through CA	391	71	169	59.3
Through appeal	17	3.1	24	8.4
Find another myself	24	4.4	14	4.9
Do not know	69	12.5	50	17.5
Moved house	4	0.7	4	1.4
Total	551	100	285	100

Chi-square:19.077, df.5, $p < 0.01$ (statistically significant)

As mentioned in chapter 2, ED employ different scaling system for boys and girls in 2001, it is interesting to note the choice result of the respondents' with child of different gender and their acceptance of allocated schools (See tables 5.13 & 5.14). From table 5.13, boys have slightly higher rate in getting one of the first five choices than girls. I also cross-tabulated this data with parents' acceptance of allocated school places, I find the following results (See table 5.15): firstly, parents with boys accept their allocated school places more than parents with girls and more girls appeal and get another schools than boys. However, as noted above parents with a

female child formed a minority of sample members and in this sense a more self-selected group, so these results may have been affected by different non-response biases among parents of male and female children.

Table5.15. Acceptance of school place by child gender

<i>Respondent child</i>		<i>Male (% within child sex)</i>		<i>Female (% within child sex)</i>	
		<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Yes,</i>	<i>Accept the school</i>	438	82.5	214	77.5
<i>No,</i>	<i>No, appeal and get another</i>	10	1.9	15	5.4
	<i>No, appeal and did not get another</i>	34	6.4	18	6.5
	<i>No, did not accept or appeal find own solution</i>	49	9.2	29	10.5
<i>Total</i>		531	100	276	100

Chi-square: 8.257, df.3, $p < 0.05$ (statistically significant)

Besides the interest of the choice result of parents with child of different gender, I am also interested in choice result of parents with different education attainment. When I cross-tabulated the success rate (First three choices) and residual rate (None of students' own choices was successful) with the educational level of parents, I have the following results (See tables 5.16 & 5.17.). Regarding the lowest educational group, we can see they have the lowest rate in attaining one of their first three choices. The secondary education group records a higher figure than the highest educational group, although the difference is just one percent. With regard to the parents' residual allocation (None of students' own choices was successful- Choice

31-did not choose the school), we can see that the higher the educational group, the lower the percentage is (12%, 9%, 8%).

Table 5.16. First three choices & residual allocation by parental education level (simplified version)

2001 survey	Primary group	Secondary group	Secondary 6 and above
First three choices	62%	66%	65%
Residual allocation	12%	9%	8%

Table 5.17. School choices by parental education levels

	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (including postgraduate)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Choice 1-5	74	69.2	321	74.4	126	75.9	521	74.1
Choice 6-27	17	15.9	66	15.3	23	13.9	106	15.1
Choice 28-30	3	2.8	1	0.2	0	0	4	.6
Choice 31 (did not choose the school)	13	12.1	37	8.6	13	7.8	63	9
Others	0	0	5	1.2	4	2.4	9	1.3
Total	107	100	430	100	166	100	703	100

Chi-square value: 16.448, df: 8, $p < 0.05$ (statistically significant)

In the interview with a policy maker in the EMB, he stated that only the first five choices are significant. So by cross-tabulating the educational attainments of parents with the first-five choices (See table 5.17), I found that the higher the educational level of the parent, the more chance there was of their being successful in their first five choices, while their chance of failure was less. When using chi-square to test the degree of confidence of association, it is found that the association is statistically significant.

Table 5.18. Accept the allocated school by parental education level

	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (including postgraduate)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
<i>Accept</i>	78	72.9	349	81.5	135	82.3	562	80.4
<i>Do not accept</i>	29	27.1	79	18.5	29	17.7	137	19.6
<i>Total</i>	107	100	428	100	164	100	699	100

Pearson Chi-square value: 15.077, df: 6, $p < 0.05$ (statistically significant)

*This originally is a 4x3 table (one accept and three not accept: a. appeal, b. not appeal and c. not appeal but find own solution, simplified into a 3x2 table.

The result from the 2001 survey shows that (See table 5.18) many more parents accepted the allocated school than those who did not accept. Furthermore, the more educated the parents were, the more they accepted their allocated school. When using chi-square to test the degree of confidence of association, it is found that the association is statistically significant.

From the above evidence, we can see that, regardless of their satisfaction with regard to primary information, the greater the educational attainment of parents, the more they manage to secure their preferred school. That is, they are more successful in this particular school choice game.

However, as I will mention in section 5.4 later, securing these first 5 choices statistically may not in reality lead to total success since in a small number of cases parents were forced to rank their schools of choice in order by primary school staffs. I would now like to look at the banding of the child (provided by the respondents, not official) and the banding of their present secondary school (provide by my source, not official) to see whether they have the right match.

Table 5.19. Banding of respondent child (provided by the respondent) and the banding of child's present schools by parental education level

Respondent child banding (information/guessing from primary)	Present school banding	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (including postgraduate)		Total
		F	%	F	%	F	%	
Band I	I	23	76.7	167	88.8	99	92.5	289
	II	4	13.3	18	9.6	6	5.6	28
	III	3	10	3	1.6	2	1.9	8
	Total	30		188		107		325
Chi-square:10.413, df:4, p<0.5, (statistically significant)								
Band II	I	4	21.1	24	27.6	8	38.1	36
	II	11	57.9	53	60.9	10	47.6	74
	III	4	21.1	10	11.5	3	14.3	17
	Total	19		87		21		127
Chi-square:2.672, df:4, (statistically not significant)								
Band III	II	4	36.4	5	16.1	0	0	9
	III	7	63.3	26	83.9	5	100	38
	Total	11		31		5		47
Chi-square:3.472, df:2, (statistically not significant)								
Do not know	I	11	22.9	39	30.5	15	37.5	65
	II	17	35.4	39	30.5	15	37.5	71
	III	20	42.7	50	39.1	10	25	80
	Total	48		128		40		216
Chi-square:4.121, df:4, (statistically not significant)								

When I compare the children's own banding (See table 5.19) and the banding of the school they are in now, I find that band I children were more likely to gain entry to band I schools the higher the educational level of their parents. Conversely, the lower the educational level of parents, the wider the discrepancy between their children's banding and the banding of their present school.

Regarding the Band II children (See table 5.19), we again find that the lower the parents' educational group, the more pupils enter lower-band schools. Only among Band III children, whose sample numbers were much smaller, we found the opposite association. However, when use chi-square to test the associations, it is found that the association is statistically significant only in the band I table.

As Hong Kong parents compete to get limited popular school places. I can conclude that, the higher the education of parents, the more they can get more popular schools for their children while the lower the education of parents, the less they can get popular schools for their children.

In the interviews, when asked about their overall feelings toward choosing, most parents stated that they were very nervous and anxious about the process:

Very panicky, every parent is the same, panicky and nervous. Always fearful that he won't get into the school I want. It's nonsense when people say they don't care whether the school is EMI or not. It's nonsense.

It is more difficult when parents do not accept the allocated school. It is common for parents to walk around trying to get another school place. One parent told the researcher that she was exhausted but she had to do it:

I have to. You know, when we found that the school was not good, at that time, we, my husband and I went everywhere for a few days to find a school for my son. We nearly went to every school...I was anxious. Some schools told me they had no places. Some schools said the school was already full. I was exhausted walking here and there for a few days.... exhausted. Every body said, why were you allocated this one?...I felt very bad, very distressed. My son didn't like it. Maybe because he is my eldest son, I am very concerned.

Another parent told the researcher that she was very disappointed even although she had tried hard throughout the process:

This experience made me feel very disappointed. When I filled in the form, I asked the primary school teacher what kind of banding my child was in. She told me firmly that my son belonged to band I. I asked her again whether she was sure. She told me she was very sure. Of course I believed her and had no doubts about it then. Then I conducted a small research myself. I attended the seminar 'How to choose a school' organised by the government. I asked them how many primary 6 students in X this year. As I remember, they told me that there were about 6000-7000 pupils. I can't remember the exact figure now. I then counted how many Band I schools there were in X. There are about 13 band I schools and on average there are about 200 places in each school. Then I estimated the number of band I places is about 2400 in X this year. I counted one third of the 6000 to 7000 students. I know that there is enough band I places for band I students in X this year. After my counting, I then felt secure and put the 13 band I schools into order according to proximity and academic level. But the result is my son was not allocated to these 13 schools. We only got our 16th choice school. At that time I was very disappointed. I quickly asked the primary school teacher why. She told me she might have estimated wrongly. I feel very bad about her. I was very angry but I couldn't say anything.

She is also very angry at the government's policy and repeatedly stated that it's wrong for the government to keep the banding of students secret. The researcher could feel her emotion and anger during the interview:

The government needs to tell us which band our child is in so that we can choose the school correctly. The government wants us to estimate. How can we know if our estimation is correct? It all depends on yourself, whether you fail or succeed; it all depends on your own decision. If you don't announce it, we have to guess, I feel that this is very wrong. From the beginning the government has the responsibility to tell us of our child's banding before we choose a school. Then we parents can decide whether to take the risk or not. This is the parent's personal decision. Fail or succeed, the parent can bear the responsibility. You can't just depend on luck and random factors...this is absolutely unfair

and not good. I don't think it's right for the government to put the choice of a child's school as a kind of gambling, to put his academic achievement at stake, it's not right. The government needs to tell us the banding, as we can then decide whether we take the risk or not...I feel very unhappy but I can't say anything. The primary school teacher can only estimate. It's possible that she estimated it wrongly, as the government didn't give us any information. But why should you have to put a student's academic achievement at stake, as a guess. Why don't you tell him in the first place? Whether the parent wants to take a risk or not all depends on himself/herself, but you need to tell him/her. If a band I parent doesn't know his child's banding and chooses a band II School, he may get into a band II School successfully, but it's not fair to him. If a band II student who is very lucky and gets a place, it's not fair. I think this policy is allocating the places very unfairly. It is very wrong.

One parent told the researcher that he felt trapped and that he had no way out after the result was announced.

However, for some parents the experience is not so bad. One parent told the researcher that she was concerned but not too nervous:

To a certain limit. Not too seriously but of course I think of his future...it is important. But it didn't make me too nervous.

5.4. Information, success and equality of opportunities

The information given to parents in choosing schools is universally important, as stated in the literature review chapter. It is even more important in the case of Hong Kong, and particularly so as the situation intensified more in the surveyed year due to the abrupt change of the policy. Though parents have to follow the matching rules of the choice game, there is a higher possibility of making errors in the 2001 SSPA. It is because of the cutting of bands, the abolition of the AAT test and through the use of the past three years' results as the basis of the new scaling system. This is

problematic because a scaling system based on previous results is an imperfect indicator of the school performance of the coming year.

Obviously, school results can vary from year to year. They may improve or get worse each year. Furthermore, serious consequences can follow when the wrong estimation of banding is made. The problem of who is to blame has to be addressed and the accuracy of the estimation of banding from primary staff therefore is vital to parents' success. Other variables such as teachers' individual experience and eagerness to help also played an important role here. Are all the parents satisfied with the information received from the primary school?

Regarding the information-gathering period and the sources of parents, findings show that the information-gathering period of Hong Kong parents varies from a few months to a few years. In the interview with parents, some parents stated that they started gathering information at a very early stage, even, for example, when their children were in Primary 4 or 5. Moreover, they have different channels of gathering information. From around November to March, it is quite common to find parents talking about school choice in the street, on the bus...etc.

This phenomenon is common, as traditionally Chinese parents have a high regard for education. They see it as a way of achieving upward social mobility, as stated in chapter I. One parent, a housewife, told the researcher that she had more time to collect information, visit schools and ask questions:

I am lucky. I am a housewife. When I had time, I talked to my friends. I asked the parents I know. I went to have a look at the school environment. Then I thought they were OK. Then I attended their open days. I only asked a few questions, not too many. It's because at that

time I was not sure whether my son would go there or not. The main reason is to have a look at the school environment, to make sure that it's ok or not too bad. I asked the parents whether the teachers have patience or not. I just asked very general questions.

Different types of parents, however, have different kinds of knowledge about the system. This parent seems to have friends from the education sector and knows the system well before she made her choice of school:

It was several years before I actually chose the school. We also had information from primary school teachers and the Principal.

Table 5.20. Important sources of information in SSPA (both DP and CA)

	DP		CA	
	F	%	F	%
<i>Read school information</i>	103	24.6	214	30.4
<i>Visit schools</i>	50	12.0	76	10.8
<i>Talk to primary</i>	147	35.2	249	35.3
<i>Talk to secondary</i>	7	1.7	15	2.1
<i>Contact ED</i>	3	.7	8	1.1
<i>Talk to family and relatives</i>	35	8.4	45	6.4
<i>Talk to other children</i>	6	1.4	4	.6
<i>Talk to friends or neighbours</i>	33	7.9	55	7.8
<i>Newspapers</i>	7	1.7	11	1.6
<i>School web site</i>	18	4.3	21	3.0
<i>No information about school</i>	1	.2	0	0
<i>Others</i>	7	1.7	7	1
<i>By word of mouth</i>	1	.2	0	0
<i>Total</i>	418	100	705	100

From table 5.20, we learn that among the 418 respondents who participated in the DP and answered the questions, the most important sources of information provided for

parents to engage in choosing their preferred school were: talking to primary school staffs (35.2%); reading school information provided by the primary school (24.6%); visiting secondary school (12%); talking to family and relatives (8.4%); and talking to friends or neighbours (7.8%). The sources of information with regard to the CA were very similar.

From the above evidence, readers may be curious to know why parents regard the information from primary school as being so significant when making their choice. In the interview with the policy makers regarding the provision of information for parents, the policy maker from the Hong Kong Manpower Bureau emphasised that parents were not on their own and that they have access to all kinds of support:

Regarding the SSPA, firstly, we have many seminars for parents to help them how to choose schools. Secondly, I think the primary school teachers can provide parents with sufficient information. That's because primary teachers are very experienced. On the one hand they know more about the ability of their pupils, while on the other hand they know something about secondary schools. In general, for so many years, the most reliable help has been from primary school teachers. Their advice is the most important for reference purposes.

Information from primary schools is very important. On the one hand, as no official banding is given to parents, the staffs of primary schools are the ones who know the abilities of an individual child best, and this is a crucial factor in matching each child to a particular school. If parents want to succeed in this game of choice, they have to follow the rules of matching (as explained in the policy document in Ch. 2), or otherwise they will lose out.

On the other hand, staff of primary schools is also the one who perhaps knows how to evaluate the quality of education in the secondary schools. They may have more

inside knowledge about the school system, for example, about the places that are available for competition and about the chances of success in a particular school net. Therefore, they are the ones who can best help parents to be informed and make the most sensible and rational choice for their child.

However, it would be of interest to know just how satisfied parents are regarding the information they receive from the primary schools. Bearing in mind that the information from the primary school is crucial to achieving success in this choice game, it is time to look at the research findings to find out more about this issue. By examining this, we can test the claim that all parents have an equal start when playing this particular game of choice.

Table 5.21. Types, sources and contents of printed material given to P.6 parents by the primary school:

<i>Types/name of information</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>Main contents of information</i>
Secondary school Profiles	Government	Secondary school profiles of different districts
Leaflets: Outline of the SSPA Secondary One Choice of school Form	Government	The Secondary School Places Allocation System
SSPA (CD ROM)	Government	Explanation of the details in the SSPA
Leaflet	Secondary schools	Information on a specific school
Allocation statistics of each primary school	Primary school	Allocation statistics of each primary school

Generally, information from primary schools included official printed matter from the ED and consultation meetings with teachers. Official printed materials were delivered through the participating primary schools to all parents in early May 2001. These printed materials (See table 5.21) included: a 'Secondary school List' of the

school net to which the student belonged; an “Outline of the Secondary School Places Allocation system” and a “Secondary One Choice of Schools Form”.

Some primary schools informed parents of their individual primary school statistics that indicated the types of secondary schools their former students had been allocated to in the past, and which could act as a reference point for the parents choosing schools in 2001. Some parents also collected the Secondary School Profile from the ED (See table 5.21). Some other primary schools, however, delivered this document to parents. From table 5.22, we can identify the different types of information parents received from primary schools in general.

Table 5.22. Number of Parents’ Meetings and Contents of meetings in primary schools generally

<i>General number of parents’ meetings</i>	<i>General contents of such meetings</i>	<i>Person who gave talks to the parents</i>
First conference for all the P.6 parents	Introduced DP to parents	Principals, Vice-principal, class teacher
Second conference for all the P.6 parents	Introduced CA to the parents.	Principals, Vice-principal, class teacher
One or two individual parents’ meetings (interview/consultation)	Briefing and advice on individual child’s choice of school	Class teachers and subject teachers

In the individual parent consultation sections, class teachers and subject teachers give information on the child’s performance, and the kinds of schools that match their child academically. The kinds of information include the teachers’ judgement of the banding of each child and the identification of secondary schools suitable to the

child's banding. During the consultation period, parents can ask questions concerning the choice of school and the prospects of gaining entry to it.

Primary schools also give students some general information on the selection criteria of some of the popular secondary schools at the parents' meeting or to individual parents during the consultation interview. Some primary staff even help their pupils to prepare for the interview with secondary schools. This depends on the eagerness and experience of the primary staff. Findings on the issues surrounding the selection criteria of DP schools will be presented later in 5.6. Now let us turn to parents' satisfaction with the primary school's advice/information in ranking school/choice.

Table 5.23 shows that 79% of parents were satisfied and 169 (20.8%) were not satisfied. Why were not they satisfied? 102 dissatisfied parents answered the open questions. They referred to: a lack of adequate information (17.8%); wrong advice and poor information (5.2%); primary schools being too authoritative (2.7%); and primary schools not being keen to help and identify with parents from their primary schools.

Table 5.23 Satisfaction with primary school advice on ranking

	<i>F</i>	%
<i>Yes</i>	643	79.2
<i>No</i>	169	20.8
<i>Total</i>	812	100
<i>Missing (0)</i>	93	
<i>Total</i>	905	

Table 5.24. Reasons for satisfaction with primary school advice on ranking

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Yes, professional knowledge and strategy</i>	93	25.4
<i>Yes, good arrangements and information</i>	159	43.4
<i>Yes, because child gained entry to preferred school</i>	12	3.3
<i>No, wrong advice and instruction</i>	19	5.2
<i>No, too authoritative</i>	10	2.7
<i>No, not enough information</i>	65	17.8
<i>No, not keen to help and identify with parents</i>	7	1.9
<i>No, their opinion was different from mine</i>	1	0.3
<i>Total</i>	366	100

Regarding the satisfied group of parents, we found that: 159 (43.4%) commented that the information supplied and the arrangements made were good. About one quarter of the parents who answered this question stated that the information they received indicated a high level of professional knowledge and included good advice on strategy 93 (25.4%) (See table 5.24).

In the questionnaire, a few parents wrote that they were unhappy with the encounter and the kind of information given by their primary schools. In the interview a few parents said that they had to read magazines and learned how to choose schools themselves. One parent said that the primary school had not provided enough information about secondary schools:

I read magazines about how to choose schools. They taught me how to choose a school. I kept all this information. Otherwise you don't know how to choose. You don't know which school is good... They (the primary school) didn't tell me about the schools. No. They didn't mention it at all. They give you the website only. You have to see it for yourself. They don't tell you which school is good or bad. They only give you statistics about how many children go to which secondary school. You then decide for yourself.

Two other parents told the researcher that the primary teachers are too authoritative, and order parents to change the choice of schools in the Choice Form, which they had done, albeit reluctantly. One parent even voiced out her opinion that the primary school staff had ignored her and did not offer her advice, as her child was a non-achiever. She believed that the staff only cared about the bright students in the school. Another parent also told the researcher how angry, upset and frustrated she was when a very unpopular school was allocated to her daughter:

The teacher told me my daughter was a Band I student. She was so sure and advised me to choose Band I schools for my daughter.... And a Band III school was allocated. Afterwards, she admitted that she was wrong. But I couldn't blame her. It's just estimation. The government ought to give us the information on banding. There is so much at stake here. Why didn't the government...? It's not right to put my daughter's future in a lottery. But I couldn't blame her, she just estimated it...

One parent in the interview complained that her child's school's only concern was about school statistics. She claimed that the school forced parents to follow its advice in ranking schools in order to make the school statistics look good. The researcher then conducted a follow-up check at a few primary schools' web sites. This confirmed that some primary schools like to boast of the success rate of parental choice, for example, which percentage secured their first choice...etc. at the expense of the real preference of parents. This use of statistics in marketing the school is problematic and often makes parents angry.

Furthermore, although parents in Hong Kong regard school choice as being very important, not all the parents know the importance of gathering information and knowing which strategy to choose. One parent told the researcher that she did not know which school to choose and changed schools twice, one soon after the result

was announced in July and the other a year later. When asked whether she had collected any information before choosing schools, she answered 'no', saying that the primary school had only given her a list of secondary schools that she could choose from.

Findings in the present study show that some parents collected information vigorously while other parents depended solely on information from the primary school. Some received good advice from the primary school on strategy while others did not. Some found that engaging in school choice was difficult, although others found it easy:

I put all the very impossible ones at the end. The most possible one and the most preferred ones, I put in the front. I ranked the schools this way. It's because the primary school teachers told me what kind of schools matched my child. Of course, I trust the teacher. After he told me how many schools would suit, then I considered the schools myself. Then I ranked the school. If the school was too far away, I put it at the end. I live in Shatin. It's not reasonable that I put schools in Ma Hon Shun in the front. I then put it at the end from choice thirty to the front...Not very difficult. I felt that the primary school was very good in preparing us. They gave us a meeting and analysed everything for us. They told us about our children and the schools that matched them. We were well prepared. I am very satisfied with the primary school... I felt very comfortable and easy.

One parent stated that she was lucky and did not have any bad feelings about the process:

My son got his first choice school. For me, I don't have any bad feelings. But for some other parents who have daughters.... They couldn't get the school they wanted. They felt very disappointed and panicky. For myself, I have got the school I wanted. Maybe I am lucky.

All this evidence shows that parents had different experiences and that primary schools provide information to parents in different ways. The claim that all parents have an equal start when playing this particular game of choice is simply not true.

Table 5.25. Satisfaction of primary advice on ranking by choices of allocated school

	<i>Satisfied</i>		<i>Not satisfied</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	
<i>Choice 1-5</i>	506	85	89	15	595
<i>Choices 6-31 (31-did not choose the school at all)</i>	118	62	73	38	191
<i>Total</i>	624		162		786

Chi square: 47.851, df. 1, $p < 0.001$, (statistically significant)

Regarding information and success, I asked the parents' how they had ranked the school, which they were eventually allocated. Those who got one of their first 5 choices are regarded as successful. As I cross-tabulated this answer with their satisfaction of primary school information, I have the following result (See table 5.25).

We can see that out of the 624 who were satisfied with the primary school information, 506 (81.1%) received their first 5 choices and 118 (18.9%) did not obtain their first 5 choices of school. For the not satisfied group, 89 (54.9%) secured their first five choices and 73 (45.1%) did not. We know that primary school advice on ranking schools is vital for success. However, we still need to acknowledge that securing one's first 5 choices of school may not really equal 'success'.

As mentioned previously, the reason for this is that a small number of parents commented that some primary schools are very authoritative and sometimes even force parents to change their own ranking in order to make the school statistics look good. The school can then claim that it has a high percentage of parents securing their first five choices. This use of statistics is also found in the interview data with the parents. Therefore, the success rate here is considered by the researcher to be to a

certain extent problematic, although the number of parents affected is small. Fortunately, I have a further question that can give us information about whether parents accept their allocated school or not (See table 5.26).

Table 5.26. Satisfaction of Primary school advice on ranking by acceptance of allocated school

Satisfaction of primary school advice	Satisfied		Not satisfied		Total
	F	%	F	%	
Yes, accept the allocated school	531	85.9	95	59.7	626
No, not accept	87	14.1	64	40.3	151
Total	618	100	159	100	777

Chi square: 55.334, df1, p<0.001 (statistically significant)

In the satisfied group, more people accept their allocated school than those who do not accept it (85.9%, 14.1%). In the dissatisfied group, 59.7% accept their allocated school while 40.3% do not. So, some parents were satisfied with primary school’s advice but did not accept the allocated school and some, though they were not satisfied with their primary school’s advice, accepted allocated school. For those who did not accept the school, they either appealed or found another school place themselves.

For those who were not satisfied with primary school advice, may be they did not follow primary school’s advice at the last minute of ranking or may be they followed it but did not get what they wanted (did not accept the allocated school). Therefore, dissatisfaction may be an outcome effect caused by the failure of getting the school place they wanted.

In short, from the above two pieces of the quantitative evidence, we know that there is a significant link between information, success and satisfaction. When parents have good advice, they were likely to be successful. When parents got the school place they wanted, they, in turn, were satisfied with the primary school's advice. This may be just an 'outcome effect'

Furthermore, from the qualitative evidence, I also find evidence that parents were not on an equal footing in making school choice. How to ensure that every parent is on an equal footing, can gain access to information that they need and can then make an informed choice? This is perhaps the future task of the EMB.

Table 5.27. Satisfaction of Primary school advice on ranking by parental education level

Parental education level	Primary level		Secondary level		Secondary and up (includes postgraduates)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Satisfied	84	82.4	323	78.6	128	76.6	535	78
Not satisfied	18	17.6	88	21.4	39	23.4	145	21.3
Total	102	100	411	100	167	100	680	100

Chi-square value:1.234, df:2, p< 0.05 (statistically significant)

As my interest is on equality of opportunities of the SSPA, I come to the findings of the links between this evidence and that of different groups of parents with different educational backgrounds (See table 5.27).

It is interesting to note that the lower the educational level of parents, the more they are satisfied with the primary school advice on ranking, while the higher the educational level of parents, the less they are satisfied with the primary school

information. When using chi-square test, it is found that the association is statistically significant.

Besides the above analysis of different education groups of parents, I am also interested in parents' experience with child of different gender (See table 5.28).

Table 5.28 Primary school advice satisfaction by child gender

<i>Gender of child</i>	<i>Male (% within child sex)</i>		<i>Female (% within child sex)</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Yes, satisfy</i>	420	81	204	76
<i>No, not satisfy</i>	98	19	63	24
<i>Total</i>	518	100	267	100

Chi-square:2.364, df.1 (statistically not significant)

Although more parents with a male child than parents with a female child expressed satisfaction with primary school advice (81.8%, 76.4%), when using chi-square to test the association it is found that the association is statistically not significant. Hong Kong parents with a female child are not different from parents with male child. They regard academic aspects as the most important criterion in choosing school and have same aspiration in their child's future career prospect when considering school choice too. As I have mentioned before, I have strong evidence of the link between success and gender in the 2001 SSPA cycle. When the society seemed to favour male child and treated them differently, unequal opportunities occurred.

Regarding the information of selection criteria of DP school, some parents also stated that schools have the right to select the best students but that this procedure should

not depend on friendships or relationships. The selection criteria, as one parent stated, should be transparent and fair:

I think each school has the right to select students. What kind of students they want, they have the power to decide. I think they have the right to do so. A good school can select the best students. They can't just allow their friends into the school or depend on any kind of relationship... they have the right to decide what kind of criteria. If they don't base it on this, that is their administration problem.

The transparency of selection criteria for the DP secondary schools was very low in the 2001 survey. Only a few secondary schools in 2001 directly stated in the application form what their selection criteria were. When parents were asked if they knew the selection criteria, only 138 (23.8%) said they did. And of these, only 27 (24.1%) were from DP secondary schools (See tables 5.29 & 5.30).

Table 5.29. Known selection criteria of DP

<i>Known criteria</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Yes</i>	138	23.8
<i>No</i>	441	76.2
<i>Total</i>	579	100
<i>Missing (0)</i>	15	
<i>Irrelevant (99-not participate in DAPS)</i>	311	
<i>Total</i>	905	

Table 5.30. Source of DP secondary school selection criteria

<i>Sources</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>From primary school</i>	45	40.2
<i>From secondary school</i>	27	24.1
<i>From other sources: friends, family, printed materials...etc.</i>	40	35.7
<i>Total</i>	112	100
<i>Missing (0,99)</i>	793	
<i>Total</i>	905	

In the interview, one parent stated that she did not know the DP selection criteria and felt that it was not fair and was difficult to choose:

I always feel that this is not fair...Many parents found it hard to follow.
Many parents just choose a school blindly.

One parent told the researcher that she had attended a meeting about applying for a DP school but found it ridiculous:

I think it's very ridiculous. They told you one thing and acted another way. I attended the meeting. A student told us his story. He hadn't performed well but still got into the school...My son was upset when he couldn't get into the DP school.

Another parent was luckier; she learned about the criteria from the primary school and from her friends:

For the discretionary (DP), we just applied. I haven't got a very clear idea. I just know what kind of grade they demand, what kind of mark they required for the core subjects...No, not the application form, just the primary school teachers. They told me. Other parents who had chosen the school before told me about this. I learned about the requirements from them, not from the application form.

Perhaps some parents are more aggressive in this way in obtaining information from other sources in order to complement and compensate the insufficient information they receive from their primary school.

5.5. DP participation, choice barrier and equality of opportunities

When I asked parents about their child's present school place (See table 5.31), I found that the higher the education of the parent, the more often they secure a place through DP (11%, 8.5%, 5.4%).

Table 5.31. School place by parental education level

	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (includes postgraduate)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
<i>Through DP</i>	6	5.4	37	8.5	19	11	62	8.6
<i>Through CA</i>	78	69.6	292	67.1	111	64.5	481	66.9
<i>Through appeal</i>	7	6.3	18	4.1	9	5.2	34	4.7
<i>Did not accept allocated place, found own one</i>	6	5.4	21	4.8	11	6.4	38	5.3
<i>Don not know (DP or CA)</i>	15	13.4	66	15.2	21	12.2	102	14.2
<i>Exceptional case-Move house</i>	0	0	1	0.2	1	0.6	2	0.3
<i>Total</i>	112	100	435	100	172	100	719	100

As there is luck in the random computer allocation, participation in the application for places in the first round of the DP seems to allow parents more control in the process. In fact, in the survey (See table 5.32), of the 724, parents who answered this question, 477 (65.9%) respondents participated in the DP and 247 (34.1%) did not participate. And I found that the higher the education of the parent, the higher was the participation rate in the DP. When using the Chi-square test to find the degree or confidence of association between parental education and participation in the DP, it is also found that the association is statistically significant.

Table 5.32. DP application/participation by parental education level

DP Application	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (includes postgraduate)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Yes	56	49.6	293	66.6	128	74.9	477	65.9
No	57	50.4	147	33.4	43	25.1	247	34.1
<i>Total</i>	113		440		171		724	

Chi-square value: 19.619, df:2, $p < 0.001$, (statistically significant)

In the interview, one parent from a lower educational group, said that even although her son had been allocated to a band I school through CA, she did not have the confidence to apply for a DP school and expressed the view that the DP application is confusing:

For the discretionary places system, you must have a certain standard in order to find the school... I have thought of doing so, but...I think applying to the school myself is very confusing.

From this piece of qualitative information, I can say that there is a psychological barrier for some group of parents to overcome before they can apply for a DP place, even though their children are better achievers.

Furthermore, for over-subscribed schools, it is not only the parents who choose the school, it is also that the case that the school selects the student (See chapter 6). The barrier here can be found in the application requirements, for example: conduct, academic achievement, social services...etc. In some schools, the school also interviews the parents and has group interviews with the students. Thus, the confidence of parents and students can affect their chances of success.

Another barrier to choice is tuition fees and transport costs. Readers should know that only DSS schools can charge tuition fee and there were only a very small number of DSS schools in 1999-2001 cycle.

For parents who have more material capital, the choice of a school further away from home does not pose too much of a problem. However, for parents with less material capital, any tuition fee or transport costs may hinder their application. In the interview with parents, I learned that a few tried to avoid the unpopular schools by

changing schools. Another parent told me she could not afford to change school, as the uniform was too expensive. Yet another parent did not go out and find another school because it was also too expensive:

When my elder son found a school, my heart tumbled. Every school said no place for my son. They collected application fees but told me no place for my elder son, \$ 20 for just an interview... I just feel it's very expensive...I can't say anything. This time, I appealed but failed.

Besides the interest of choice experience of different educational groups of parents mentioned above, I am also interested in the choice experience of parents with child of different gender. When I analyse DP participation (See table 5.33) slightly more parents with female child than parents with male child participate in DP. However, it is statistically not significant. Readers should note that the number of male child nearly double that of female child, the validity of this finding may not be valid too.

Table 5.33 DP participation by child gender

<i>Child gender by DP participation</i>	<i>Male (% within child sex)</i>		<i>Female (% within child sex)</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Yes</i>	355	64	194	66.9
<i>No</i>	200	36	96	33.1
<i>Total</i>	555	100	290	100

Chi-square: .720, df.1 (statistically not significant)

5.6. DP success, school selection and equality of opportunities

The survey could not reveal the success rate of DP applications. Firstly, if the allocated school is outside the local school net then we can tell that the school is from DP since all the CA school must come from the local school net. However, if the DP school is inside local school net, there is a problem since parents are

encouraged to rank the DP school as their first choice in the Choice Form in the CA. So, as one parent commented below, there is no way to know whether the allocated school is from DP or in fact from CA.

Therefore, although the questions in the survey on DP success have been asked separately (Q1.3.c. Was the application a success? Q1.6. Were you happy with the result?) in the questionnaire with different wordings, the answers to these two separate questions to a certain extent become ‘perceived success’ and ‘perceived happiness’. We can also say they are low in validity, as it is difficult for the parents to answer, as they have no way of knowing whether the allocated school belongs to the success of DP or CA.

Another problem with assessing the DP success is that there were only 20% of places available in each school in 2001. The competition was so great that many parents, though claiming to know the criteria, still failed in the DP. Thirdly, although the questionnaire had been tested in the pilot study and the wording revised afterwards, a number of parents seemed confused by this particular question (the mix up over whether the success was due to DP or CA) and thus the answers are considered to be low in validity.

Table 5.34. DP Success by known criteria or not

	<i>Known criteria</i>		<i>Not known criteria</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Success</i>	70	27	186	73	256	46
<i>Failure</i>	65	21	242	79	307	54
<i>Total</i>	135	100	428	100	563	100

Chi-square:2.916, df:1, (statistically not significant)

However, when I cross-tabulated the success and known criteria (See table 5.34), I learn that for those who claim to know the criteria, the number of successes is 70, greater than the number of failures, 65. For those who claim not to know the criteria, the number of failures, 242, is higher than those who succeeded, 186. There may be some errors in this finding because of some invalid answers. When I test the association, it is found that it is statistically not significant.

Table 5.35. Known Criteria by happy with DP result

	<i>Known</i>		<i>Not known</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Happy</i>	91	24.3	284	75.7
<i>Not happy</i>	37	22.2	130	77.8
<i>Total</i>	128		414	

Chi-square: .285, df: 1, (statistically not significant)

Fortunately, I have another question about whether parents are happy with the DP result. Then, as I cross-tabulated the known criteria and those happy with the DP result (See table 5.35), I have the following finding. For the happy group, 24.3% knew the criteria, while 75.7% did not know it. The percentage of parents (71.1%) who knew the criteria and were happy with the result is slightly higher than the percentage of parents who did not know (68.6%), the difference being only 2.5%. When use chi-square to test the association, again it is statistically not significant.

Here, with regard to the selection criteria of DP schools (See table 5.36), the less well educated the parent, the less they know the selection criteria (76.4%, 73.5%, 71.1%). As we already know, the transparency of selection criteria was low in 2001.

It seems that the better-educated group knows how to obtain more information from other sources than less well-educated group, whether it is from friends, or through visiting a school, through searching a school homepage or by reading a newspaper article on the subject. However, when using the Chi-square test to test the confidence of association, it is found that the association is not statistically significant.

Table 5.36. Known criteria by parental education level

Selection Criteria	Primary level		Secondary level		Secondary and up (includes postgraduates)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
<i>Known</i>	13	23.6	77	26.5	37	28.9	127	100
<i>Not known</i>	42	76.4	214	73.5	91	71.1	347	100
<i>Total</i>	55	100	291	100	128	100	474	100

Pearson Chi-square value: 0.586, df:2, (statistically not significant)

Table 5.37 DP success by child gender

Child gender by DP success	Male (% within child sex)		Female (% within child sex)	
	F	%	F	%
<i>Yes</i>	159	44.7	85	44.5
<i>No</i>	197	55.3	105	55
<i>Do not know</i>	0	0	1	0.5
<i>Total</i>	356	100	191	100

Chi-square: 1.868, df:2. (statistically not significant)

Table 5.38 DP result happy or not by child gender

	Male (% within child sex)		Female (% within child sex)	
	F	%	F	%
<i>Happy</i>	235	69.5	124	67
<i>Not happy</i>	103	30.5	61	33
<i>Total</i>	338	100	185	100

Chi-square: .347, df:1 (statistically not significant)

When I cross-tabulated with whether they succeed in DP and are happy with the DP result (See tables 5.37 & 5.38), the figures of boys and girls are similar too. When using chi-square to test the association, both are statistically not significant. Again, readers should be reminded that there were more parents with a male child than with a female child, which may affect the validity of the findings.

5.7. Skills, ability and equality of opportunities

Information is obviously important, but the ability and skill to maximise the utilisation of information is important too. As I have already noted, to engage in secondary school choice in Hong Kong is in no way a simple process. Indeed it requires inside knowledge of the school system and the use of some sophisticated skills by parents. The task of ranking 30 preferences/schools in the School Choice Form is already a complicated one. Parents who have little understanding, strategy and inside knowledge of how the mechanism works can easily make errors and mistakes.

A few parents in the survey said that they got a bad result simply because they made a mistake in filling in the School Choice Form. One parent in the interview told me that:

You fill in the numbers only, not the names of the schools (different schools have different code numbers), I just filled in the number incorrectly. What can I say? I can't blame anyone, it's my own fault.

Every year stories of band I students being allocated to band III schools appear again and again. Although many of these students obtained a band I school place through

the second round DP, parents still expressed how scared and worried they had been while travelling around searching for Band I school places. If they had had the correct strategy and knowledge in filling in the School Choice Form in the first place, then their first application would probably have been successful. Readers should be informed that the second round DP is the informal arrangement of schools, it takes place in July after the results of the allocation are announced.

One parent said that it was like experiencing a heart attack. Another parent stated that information from the primary school is important but which strategy to employ is not as simple:

It all depends on the primary school teacher, whether they are sincere or not... Some teachers just told you the method. But the method is just a method. You have to choose according to your child individually. You have to employ different strategies in different circumstances. Actually, it can be a subject to learn, it's not simple. It can cause a headache.

In the interview, parents who engaged in choosing a school for the first time often told the researcher that without any past experience of the process, it was difficult for them:

The bad thing is it's the first time. We have never chosen a school before.

Another parent told the researcher that she is illiterate and her daughter was the one who had to fill in the School Choice Form:

My daughter, she aimed at a very good school. She wanted a popular school. This time, we have made the wrong choices. Her performance is not bad. But this time the allocated school is very bad... She was very upset and cried a lot...She cried and cried and asked why. This is her 29th choice. She was very upset. Also it's far away, I was worried, so I want her to change school...I walked around and found 5 schools. No

school would give her a place. I brought with me her report and all her prizes. In her primary school, she got many prizes. She got A and B in her report but no school gave her a place...I panicked. I was heart-broken. My daughter is not bad. For her examination result, she could have got a better school. I feel very upset but I could not comfort her...I panicked and went everywhere to try to find a school for her. My health is not good. One time, I walked with her and I fainted...I have high blood pressure. At that time it's 200 something. I panic. I was afraid that there would be no school for her. She is not bad... Everybody told me to find another school for her but we can't find any. Every school told me they didn't have places.

She said that her daughter did not have the skill and knowledge to fill in the School

Choice Form:

...She filled it in not right and therefore was allocated the wrong school. This year, unfortunately, they scaled boys and girls differently, this year that's not fair to the girls. My daughter was too young. For her age, she is Form I this year. But she studied earlier than other children.

One parent from a low educational group also said that it was difficult for her to fill in the School Choice Form and, as a result, two of her elder children did not get their preferred choice of school. However, on this occasion, she seemed to learn from her previous experience and is more optimistic regarding her youngest son:

It's rather difficult for me to fill it in. It depends on luck...For my two elder ones, I listened to others wrongly. I was busy at my work at that time...This time, I went to see the schools myself when I had time.

As equality of opportunities is the main focus, is there any difference in the skills and abilities of different groups of parents? Again, is the claim that each parent has the same start in playing this game true?

I now turn to analyse whether parents have different abilities and skills in choosing (See tables 5.39 & 5.40). I use two questions to find whether there is a link with parental education level. First, 'now, you have been through the Discretionary Places

System, you would have gained knowledge and experience, would you go about things differently if you choose again?', second 'you have been through the centrally allocated places system, you would have gained knowledge and experience. Now, if you were to rank schools of preference again, would you rank schools differently?'

Table 5.39 Rank differently by parental education level (CA)

Parental education	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (include postgraduate)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Different	54	54	202	49.4	74	49.3
Same	46	46	207	50.6	86	50.7
Total	100	100	409	100	160	100

Chi-square: 1.480, df.2.(statistically not significant)

When parents were asked if they had a second chance would they rank school differently in CA (See table 5.39), it was found that the higher the education of parent, the higher the percentage were satisfied with their CA ranking when compared to the lower educational group (50.7%, 50.6%, 46%). When use chi-square to test the association, it is statistically not significant.

Within the ranking in CA, it is interesting to note that one parent stated in the interview that 'I believe in my ranking, though I failed to get what I wanted. I will not change anything' So, for some parents, parents' personality and confidence in how they rank also influence their response to this question.

Table 5.40 Choose same by parental education level (DP)

Parental education	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (include postgraduate)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Same	37	77.1	191	69.5	99	82.5
Different	11	22.9	84	30.5	21	17.5
Total	48	100	275	100	120	100

Chi-square: 7.653, df.2.p<.05(statistically significant)

When parents were asked that if they had a second chance would they choose the same DP school, it is interesting to note that a higher percentage of secondary group parents than the primary group (30.5%, 22.9%) would not choose the same DP school (See table 5.40). Only 17.5% of the highest educational group would change. It seems that the highest educational group was satisfied with their choice of DP school (82.5%) and would not want to change, according to the 2001 survey. When use chi-square to test the association, it is found that the association is statistically significant.

Parents who participated in the DP may have more knowledge and confidence to do so than parents who did not participate at all. Thus, the finding of the link in DP is indeed very interesting. However, readers should be informed that parents' answer of 'same' or 'different' after the choice result announced might be influenced by the 'outcome' effect.

I asked parents whether they thought that the Scaling system of ranking students in different bands was fair (See table 5.41). Around six in ten felt it was fair. This proportion did not vary significantly across educational levels.

Table 5.41. Opinion of fairness of the scaling system of ranking students into different bands by parental education level

Parental education	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (include postgraduate)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
<i>Yes, fair</i>	59	56.2	247	60.7	94	59.1
<i>No, not fair</i>	46	43.8	160	39.3	65	40.9
<i>Total</i>	105	100	407	100	159	100

Chi-square: .722, df2, (statistically not significant)

Table 5.42. Explanation of fair or not by parental education level

By parental education (% within education group)	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above	
	F.	%	F.	%	F.	%
<i>Fair, large proportion of pps gained entry to their preferred school</i>	1	2.4	5	3	4	5.7
<i>Fair, according to academic level</i>	22	53.7	91	54.2	37	52.9
<i>Clear streaming is good</i>	0	0	6	3.6	5	7.1
<i>Matching</i>	0	0	3	1.8	1	1.4
<i>Not fair, computer lottery decided everything</i>	13	31.7	50	29.8	13	18.6
<i>Five band into three, not good</i>	1	2.4	2	1.2	3	4.3
<i>Not fair, they treat boys and girls differently</i>	3	7.3	3	1.8	1	1.4
<i>Labelling too early, not good</i>	1	2.4	8	4.8	6	8.6
<i>Total</i>	41	100	168	100	70	100

When parents were asked to explain their answer further (See table 5.42), most parents, answered that it was allocated according to academic level. However, I find that the lower the education of parents, the more likely they were to say it was not fair because the computer lottery decided everything.

When I asked parents whether the reduction of five Bands into three Bands was a good development, majority (See table 5.43) said it was not good. It is statistically not significant. When I asked them to give reasons for their answers (See table 5.44), 41.4 % out of 307 answered that it was not good because it caused confusion and it was difficult to match the right school. Among them, I find that the lower the education of parents, the more they found confusion (54%, 43%, 30%).

Table 5.43 Comment on reduction of 5 bands into 3 by parental education level

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Secondary 6 & above</i>
Good	31%	32%	28%
<i>Not good</i>	69%	68%	72%

Chi-square: 1.673, df: 4, (statistically not significant)

Do their feelings illustrate their actual experience of engaging with the SSPA? To a certain extent I can only guess, but perhaps their experiences relate to a feeling of powerlessness in their dealings with the SSPA. From the data above, it seems I now have some evidence that the SSPA in Hong Kong is not neutral to parents from different socio-economic backgrounds.

When I analyse whether there is gender difference to the answer of rank different in CA and choose same in DP by gender (See tables 5.45, 5.46 & 5.47). It is found that more parents with girls than parents with boys wanted to rank differently in the CA

and it is statistically significant. Also, regarding 'choose same' or not in DP, it is found that more parents with boys than parents with girls wanted to choose same and it is statistically significant. The survey sample (11 schools from 11 school nets) included parents from boys-only, girls-only and co-educational schools. However, the fact that parents of a female child were a minority of the sample may possibly indicate that the sample of parents of female children is more affected by self-selection bias in favour of dissatisfied parents.

Table 5.44 Explanation of parents' comments on reduction of 5 bands into 3 by parental education level

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Secondary 6 & above</i>
Good-more chance	8%	6%	5%
Good-shorten students distance	12%	8%	8%
Not good-cause confusion	54%	43%	30%
Not good-too much competition for limited band I places	2%	3%	1%
Not good-lower quality and name of school	20%	32%	48%
Not good-teach mixed ability is difficult	2%	3%	4%
Not good in short term	0%	1%	0%
Not good-decrease choice	2%	3%	1%
No band is good-let school select	0%	1%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Table 5.45 Rank differently or not by child gender

	<i>Male (% within child sex)</i>		<i>Female (% within child sex)</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Different</i>	239	47.3	148	56.7
<i>Same</i>	266	52.7	113	43.3
<i>Total</i>	505	100	261	100

Chi square:6.054, df:1, $p < .02$ (Statistically significant)

When analysing whether parents regard the banding system is fair or not, to my surprise, similar percentage were found for both gender and it is statistically not significant.

Table 5.46. Choose same or not by child gender

	Male (% within child sex)		Female (% within child sex)	
	F	%	F	%
<i>Different</i>	78	23.6	61	35.3
<i>Same</i>	253	76.4	112	64.7
<i>Total</i>	331	100	173	100

Chi square:7.781, df:1, $p<.01$ (Statistically significant)

Table 5.47. Fair or not by child gender

	Male (% within child sex)		Female (% within child sex)	
	F	%	F	%
<i>Fair</i>	305	60	161	60.1
<i>Not fair</i>	203	40	107	39.9
<i>Total</i>	508	100	268	100

Chi square:.000, df:1 (statistically not significant)

5.8. Appeal participation, success and equality of opportunities

Besides the discussion on the above topic, I will also find out what kind of solutions parents have adopted to tackle an allocated school place that is unacceptable to them. This includes the findings about how effective the remedial mechanisms were, the number of appeal cases, participation and success...etc.

It was reported (28/7/01 Hong Kong Economic Journal) that there were a total of 7,722 appeal cases, of which 2,261 were successful in securing preferred school places, while 740 students qualified to appeal did not achieve re-allocation due to the

limited number of places in their preferred school (See table 5.48). It was also reported (28/7/01 Sing Tao Newspaper) that the waiting list of some popular EMI schools in the second round of DP increased to more than 100. Students who were not allocated the school of their choice in the public sector then started to apply for DSS places.

A report stated that (28/7/01 Sing Tao Newspaper), out of the 26 DSS schools, only 9 of them were full, while in 15 other DSS schools there were still 300 school places available. From this piece of information, it would be interesting to learn why DSS places are not as popular as schools in the public sector (government and aided school). Obviously, in 2001, they were a clear second choice and only then with parents who could not get their preferred school place in the public sector.

Table 5.48. Appeal cases in 2001 by child gender

	Male student		Female student		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
<i>Appeal cases</i>	2,622	34	5,100	66	7,722	100
<i>Did not qualify for appeal</i>	1,963	41.6	2,758	58.4	4,721	61.1
<i>Qualified for appeal</i>	659	22	2,342	78	3,001	38.9
<i>Appeal success and gained entry to the school</i>	267	11.8	1,994	88.2	2,261	75.3
<i>1. Got first choice school</i>	43	6.9	584	93.1	627	27.7
<i>2. Got one of first three choices of school</i>	113	8.3	1,252	91.7	1,365	60.4
<i>3. Got one of first five choices of school</i>	178	10	1,605	90	1,783	78.9
<i>Appeal success but did not gain entry to preferred school</i>	392	53	348	47	740	24.7

Sources: National data from ED

From the national data (See table 5.48) provided by ED (now EMB), we can see that many of the appeal cases and successful allocations went to female students. This is

due to the different scaling system operated for boys and girls. This kind of differential treatment was criticised as being gender-biased and unfair. With the help of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the subsequent victory of the Court case, many female students succeeded in their appeals and gained entry to their preferred school.

Again, however, there is no current national study on whether there is class-bias surrounding participation in the appeal mechanism or on the success rate of different educational groups of parents. This study, however, is interested in finding out whether there is any difference between different educational groups of parents and their participation in the process. Which group of parents knows their rights and which groups do not? These issues will be addressed in this section. In addition, we will hear the grievances of the parents who lost out in this perilous game of choice.

Table 5.49. Appeal participation by parental education level (simplified version)

	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (including postgraduate)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
<i>Appeal</i>	15	52	36	46	16	55	67	49
<i>Did not appeal (find own solution)</i>	14	48	43	54	13	45	70	51
<i>Total- Did not accept the allocated school group</i>	29	100	79	100	29	100%	137	100

Chi-square: 15.077, df: 6, $p < 0.02$ (statistically significant)

In my survey, from the choice outcome mentioned previously, I know that 562 (80.4%) out of the 699 who answered this question accepted the school they were

allocated and 67 (9.6%) did not accept their allocation, but appealed. 70 (10%) did not accept the school and did not appeal, but found their own solution instead. Within this group of parents who did not accept their allocated schools (See table 5.49), I find that those parents with the highest education had the highest rate of participation in the appeal. When using Chi-square to test the confidence of association, it is found that the association is statistically significant.

It would be interesting to know why there was a difference in the participation of appeals amongst parents who did not accept the allocated school. The illiterate parent mentioned previously told the researcher that she regretted that she and her daughter did not participate in the appeal mechanism. She told the researcher that if they had appealed, her daughter would have got the school place she wanted. A few of her classmates, who were less able/achievers than her daughter, had appealed and were successful. She told me that her daughter cried and was very upset that they did not appeal. When asked why she did not appeal, she said:

At first we wanted to appeal, but her friend told her if she failed, she would be more upset by it. In the end, she didn't appeal. Some of her classmates, who weren't any better than my daughter appealed and got the school they wanted. When my daughter heard about that she cried...she lost her chance. If she appealed, she would have the school...We were just scared...We didn't know...We worried.'

From both the survey and the interview, we know that there are psychological barriers that some people are opposed by in participating in the appeal process. This is sometimes linked to ignorance and to the social and cultural capital of parents and students.

Within the appeal group (See table 5.50), parents with the highest education (secondary 6-7 to postgraduate) had the best rate of success (52.9%) when compared with other groups of parents. However, when using Chi-square to test the confidence of association, it is found that the association is statistically not significant.

Table 5.50. Appeal outcome by parental education level

	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (includes postgraduate)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Success	6	40	9	23.1%	9	52.9	24	33.8
Failure	9	60	30	76.9%	8	47.1	47	66.2
Total---(the appeal group)	15(21.1%)	100%	39(54.9%)	100	17 (23.9%)	100	71	100

Chi-square: 5.045, df:2, (statistically not significant)

Table 5.51 Appeal participation/reasons by child gender

Child gender by appeal participation	Male (% within child sex)		Female (% within child sex)	
	F	%	F	%
Never chose the school	6	16.2	4	11.8
Not happy with the allocated school	29	78.4	30	88.2
If appeal, I can get my preference school	2	5.4	0	0
Total	37	100	34	100

Chi-square:2.294, df:2 (statistically not significant)

Table 5.52. Appeal outcome by child gender

Child gender by appeal outcome	Male (% within child sex)		Female (% within child sex)	
	F	%	F	%
Success	10	22.7	18	48.6
Failure	34	77.3	19	51.4
Total	44	100	37	100

Chi square 5.971, df. 1, $p < 0.02$ (statistically significant)

In 2001, the gender factor in the appeal also played an important part as girls had to contend with a different scaling scheme and seemed to be treated unfairly. From our survey data (See tables 5.51 & 5.52), girls certainly seem to have a much higher rate of success than boys. When chi-square is used to test the association, it is found that it is statistically significant. However, as mentioned before, the successful rate may be due to the aid and contribution of the Equal Opportunities Commission in Hong Kong in the wake of their successful court case of 2001. After the court case, the ED removed the gender-biased features and since 2002 the same scaling system has been used for both boys and girls.

As well as the above findings, I also obtained some comments on the appeal mechanism from both the survey and interviews. In the survey, six parents commented that the system is better now than it was before as they now have the right to appeal and, if necessary, put things right through the courts. However, 11 parents commented that the appeal mechanism is nonsensical and useless. In the interview, one parent said she could not have any feelings about the SSPA changes, as it was the government that wanted the change, and not her:

I can't have any feelings. The government wanted to change. What can I say? If more parents speak out, it may be effective. I have no more comment. It's not up to me.

She also stated that the appeal system is good, and is better than in the past:

Many parents appealed. They found justice after an appeal. In the past, we didn't have any chance to appeal.

5.9. End products, perceived satisfaction and barrier to change schools

Given that students have now spent almost one year in their new schools, it is now important to know how they have adapted to these schools and to find out about their parents' feelings toward the school, that is, their perceived satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Table 5.53. Present school place by parental satisfaction

Satisfaction School Place	Rank 1 (Most)		Rank 2		Rank 3		Rank 4		Rank 5 (Least)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Through DP	23	32.9	26	37.1	12	17.1	4	5.7	5	7.1	70	100
Through CA	110	19.7	160	28.6	182	32.6	77	13.8	30	5.4	559	100
Either through DP/CA	47	39.8	33	28	29	24.6	6	5.1	3	2.5	118	100
Through Appeal	8	20	11	27.5	12	30	9	22.5	0	0	40	100
Find own solution	7	18.4	16	42.1	14	35.7	7	17.9	4	10.5	38	100
Others e.g. move house	2	33.3	0	0	3	50	1	16.7	0	0	6	100
Total	197	23.7	246	29.6	242	29.1	104	12.5	42	5.1	831	100

So, one year on, I found that more parents are satisfied with their child's present school than those who are dissatisfied (See table 5.53), irrespective of whether their children gained entry to the school through DP and CA. However, a higher percentage of parents whose children gained entry through the DP are satisfied with their allocated school than those parents who were allocated through CA. Those parents who did not choose their child's present school are still very dissatisfied, although some parents stated that they like their child's present school.

One parent commented that her child could not even hear what the teacher was saying as there were too many students talking in the classroom. She asked: 'How can she learn in such an environment?' One parent said that though the school was a band III School, the new Principal was very good and her child liked the school. She said 'The most important thing is that he likes the school and feels happy'.

Another parent said that choosing such an unpopular school is like choosing to be a loser and nobody would do that. This parent told the researcher that her son had lost the incentive to learn. 'The school is very bad,' she commented. A few parents from the two EMI schools told the researcher that teachers did not care about students nowadays. They said that their children could not catch up and that no teacher offers to help: 'Teachers just teach, they don't care.'

One parent said she is not optimistic and that 'teachers nowadays are different from teachers in the past as they only teach and don't care any more about their pupils':

I am not optimistic. The conception and responsibility in schools has changed quickly. The teachers are very different from the past. In the past, teachers had the ambition to educate their pupils and not to just do a job. They don't spend much time in caring and understanding the children now. It's not good for the students.

When I asked parents if they wanted to change school, 707 respondents answered this question, 92.8% stated that they did not want to change school while 6.9% stated that they did want to change school (.3% stated that they did not know). When I asked why they wanted to change school and cross-tabulated this finding with the parents' educational level, I found the following results (See table 5.54):

From this explanation (See table 5.54), I found that the higher the parental educational level, the more satisfied parents were and so they did not want to change schools. Regarding the parents who wanted to change schools, the higher the parental educational level, the more parents wanted to change to a school with a better ethos. With regard to the dissatisfied parents, it is interesting to note that it seemed that the lower the parental educational level, the more they felt powerless to make a change of school.

Table 5.54. Explanation of change school or not by parental educational level

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Secondary 6 and above (include postgraduate)</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Change, do not like the present one, find one with good school ethos.</i>	4.9%	8.4%	11.1%	8.4%
<i>Do not bother, no need</i>	19.5%	11.9%	9.3%	12.6 %
<i>The school suit my child</i>	17.1%	21%	25.9%	21.4 %
<i>I am satisfied with the present school</i>	41.5%	46.9%	48.1%	46.2 %
<i>Too late, can not go to good school now</i>	12.2%	9.1%	3.7%	8.4%
<i>Move house</i>	4.9%	2.8%	0%	2.5%
<i>Go study abroad</i>	0%	0%	1.9%	.4%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%

* Only 238 out of the 707 respondents who answered yes or no gave explanation

In the parental interview, one parent told the researcher that she could not change school because her son refused to change after he had made a lot of friends in the school:

He has got friends here, it's difficult for me to ask him to change. He doesn't want to listen.'

For this parent, then, although she is not satisfied with the school, the student did not want to change school due to peer group pressure. Another parent told me:

It's difficult to change. The school uniform (Hong Kong schools have school uniforms) are very expensive. You know, we just can't afford it'

So, for this parent, although she wanted to change school, financial reasons were a barrier to such a change.

Chapter 6 School in the market place

6.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to present findings that address the fourth and fifth research sub-questions: How do schools with different popularity, respond to the changes in the SSPA? And how does the new SSPA impact on schools with different popularity? The chapter starts with a brief introduction of the characteristics of the four case study schools in 6.2 and an account of the interview data and treatment of the data in 6.3. Third, findings on any institutional change: school image and publicity activities featured in the four case study schools will be in 6.4 and the reasons for changes in student recruitment/selection will be presented in 6.5. The findings of changes in the selection criteria in other schools other than the four case study schools as triangulation will also be presented in 6.6. Lastly, the findings of the study on school enrolment will be in 6.7, social composition and the issue of equality of opportunities will be presented in 6.8.

6.2. *Characteristics of the four case study schools*

To begin with, I will give a general picture of the four case study schools (See table 6.1) and their neighbourhoods. EMI1 is surrounded by public housing estates and with buses and MTR (Mass Transit Railway) station nearby. EMI2 is near a train station and is surrounded by both private and public housing estates. CMI1 is

surrounded by public housing estates, while CMI2 is situated in a remote, rather rural hillside area (comparatively) with no public transport available and is difficult to access.

Table 6.1. General characteristics of the four aided case study schools in 2001-2:

	EMI1	EMI2	CMI1	CMI2
<i>History</i>	More than 30 yrs.	More than 15 yrs.	More than 10 yrs.	More than 40 yrs.
<i>Number of teaching staff</i>	56	56	55	57,
<i>Total number of students F1-F7</i>	About 1,140	About 1,120	About 870	About 1,000
<i>Curriculum</i>	Mainly academic	Mainly academic	Mainly academic	Mainly academic
<i>Average Form 1 class size in 01-02</i>	43	40	38	16
<i>Extra-curricular activities</i>	Over 40 in 01-02, Over 45 in 03-04 (increase)	Over 40 in 01-02 and 03-04 (no information on whether increased or decreased)	Over 40 in 01-02, Over 50 in 03-04 (Increased)	Over 45 in 01-02, Under 45 in 03-04 38 in 04-05 (decreased)
<i>Band (degree of popularity)</i>	I	Band I in 2001, (popularity dropped a little in 2002-03 to band I-II)	III	III
<i>Medium of instruction</i>	English (EMI)	English (EMI)	Chinese (CMI)	Chinese (CMI)
<i>Campus area</i>	About 4,000 sq. ft.	About 5,600 sq. ft.	About 5,000 sq. ft.	About 5,000 sq. ft.
<i>Co-ed. Boys/Girls</i>	Boys	Co-ed.	Co-ed.	Co-ed.
<i>Easy access to public transport</i>	Yes, Bus and MTR stations opposite school	Yes, Bus and train stations near the school	Yes, Bus and MTR station within walking distance	No, No easy access to public transport

Regarding the demand for and supply of secondary school places, I learned from the two Principals of EMI1 and EMI2 that the demand and supply situation in their school nets are even and not over-supplied or under-supplied. Regarding schools CMI1 and CMI2, however, the situation is different. According to information from CMI1 administrator, many families have migrated to the newly developed area just next to the school net of CMI1. Though new schools are on the way in the newly developed area, these new schools will not be ready until 2008. Therefore, prior to 2008 there is going to be a great demand for places in the CMI1 school net.

According to information from the CMI2 Principal, the school population has declined in the CMI2 net areas; there was an over-supply of primary school places, causing many primary schools to close down. However, the CMI2 Principal stated that from the government perspective, secondary school places are different from primary school places as they are counted in a Hong Kong wide context, rather than in a local one, and so CMI2 could provide places for the area next to the CMI2 school net.

Table 6.2. Parental education of the respondents of the four schools in the 2001 survey

4 case study schools	Primary		Secondary		S6-7, university graduate and post graduate		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
EMI1	3	8.6	26	74.3	6	17.1	35	100
EMI2	11	9.7	69	61.1	33	29.2	113	100
CMI1	8	17.8	30	66.7	7	15.5	45	100
CMI2	13	28.3	29	63	4	8.7	46	100
Total	35		154		50		239	

Chi-square:17.492; df:6; p:.01 (statistically significant)

Remarks: the figures show the number of the respondents who were willing to provide information on their education levels in each school, not the total number of students in the schools.

The parental education levels of the respondents in School EMI1 and School EMI2 are higher than in School CMI1 and School CMI2; this association is statistically significant (See table 6.2). The qualitative interview data with the school administrators also suggest that the social class levels in schools EMI1 and EMI2 are higher than in CMI1 and CMI2. In both CMI1 and CMI2, the school administrators said that many students in their schools lacked parental help and care and that their expectations were lower, particularly because of the poor financial situation of the parents.

Regarding the position of schools in competition with each other, I have learned from the interview data of parents that EMI1 and EMI2 are popular schools which many parents would like as their first choice of school. This may be due to the reasons that both schools are band I schools and both employ English as the medium of instruction, these two factors being amongst the five most important factors mentioned in chapter 5 with regard to parents choosing schools.

Moreover, I find that EMI1 is more popular than EMI2. EMI2 Principal and parents stated that the banding (degree of popularity of schools perceived by the public) of EMI2 dropped in 2003 from band I to band I-II as the delinquent behaviour of a few students in the school was publicised in the press and led to parents worrying about the school's ethos. From the data, CMI1 and CMI2 schools are not popular schools, while CMI1 is marginally preferable to CMI2. A few parents chose CMI1 as their discretionary place school. CMI2 school, however, has an even worse reputation and it did not receive any discretionary place applications at all.

Parents' comments of CMI2 include:

I would never choose this school' and: 'nobody would like to choose this school; choosing this school means choosing to be a loser.

From these pieces of information, we know that CMI2 is the kind of school that parents would like to avoid and if their children were allocated this school, they would feel as if they had lost face. This is because nobody wants to be a loser or regarded by others as a loser.

Table 6.3. Leadership style and attitude of the four case study schools

	EMI1	EMI2	CMI1	CMI2
<i>Leadership style</i>	Confident and strong leadership Proud of their traditional methods of teaching	Unconfident and comparatively weak leadership	Confident and strong leadership	Confident and charismatic leadership
<i>Attitude toward changes</i>	All the staff including the Principal are sceptical of the reform and very selective regarding changes	Pressurised into change but lack of consensus among the staff	Acknowledge the need to improve and willing to change aggressively	Aggressive and happy to change

Regarding the schools' attitude toward changes (See table 6.3) it is interesting to note that the two CMI schools are more willing to change and innovate than the two EMI schools. EMI1, the most popular of the four, is the most sceptical and unwilling to change. It has not changed its curriculum or teaching methods.

Its Principal is proud of its traditional teaching methods and questions the current reforms:

In short, we are very careful and selective in implementing the reforms in our school...Generally, after I read the policy, this is what all my colleagues agree, many topics in the education reforms are not practical...We implement some of the policy put forward by the

government. But basically, our school has done some of the things they put forward for a long time...Why don't we learn what other countries are doing now? Why must we learn from what other countries' mistakes were ten years ago? They were their mistakes, so we don't learn from them. I just don't understand, there are so many pieces of research and evidence. Why do we need these kinds of reforms?

EMI2 has undergone some changes and planned to revise its syllabus according to the University Entrance requirements. In general, the school seems to be overcrowded with problems and lacks a school-wide consensus for change and innovation. As the Principal stated, he is accountable and faces pressures on every front - from the EMB, the public, the teaching staff, the School Sponsor Body and the parents.

By comparison, EMI1 has faced the abrupt and extensive reforms in a calmer manner, while EMI2 has found it difficult to gain a consensus of agreement that would help to deal with the demands upon it more successfully. The following comments made by the EMI2 Principal inform us of his difficulties in facing the situations created by the reform:

For administrators, there are so many documents, paper work, difficulties and pressures from outside. From the political perspective, you now face the public, the school government body, and the mentality of all your teaching staffs. Other than all this, you have to face your own educational values. All these are bringing you into conflicts. Under all these changes, education reforms are not easy. You say this, he says something else. You say his teaching is not good. He says he is good at non-teaching aspects, why don't you look at this and only look at one aspect? These are all problems deriving from decentralisation. New circumstances emerge. From my point of view, this is the political aspect. The role of administration increases, on the one hand, there are so many expectations upon you. Everybody's expectation is different, you have to find consensus. Otherwise you don't have the ability to face all these situations. On the other hand, you have to handle so many documents. You hope to adopt a good system. But you have to write all the reports on all the people you encounter in your work.

In 2005-06, the Principal of EMI2 resigned.

CMI and CMI2 are the two schools that have undergone far-reaching and radical changes. Lots of innovations can now be seen in the school. 'The world is changing and we need to change' is what the policy makers proclaim and this is echoed by the two CMI school administrators. According to the administrative staff (delegate teacher) CMI1 has cut down, merged and created new subjects in junior years (Secondary 1-3) in order to cater for their students' abilities and interests.

The Principal in CMI2 also stated that the staff has initiated lots of innovations and can now tell the public of their success. Their students have shown great leadership and won many awards in sport activities, both locally and in the wider Hong Kong context. The Principal of CMI2 told the researcher that there was not any vandalism in school any more. He said this was a tremendous improvement as there had been so much vandalism in the school in the past. He is very proud that some of his students who had previously been expelled from popular band I schools had changed their behaviour and now had a sense of belonging and were studying hard in their new school.

It seems that this Principal is using the interview as a publicity activity, to sell his school. He may well have been trying to persuade the researcher that the school has improved and made its contribution. Thus it is reasonable that EMB should give the survival space to this school. However, parents in this school also confirmed with the researcher that the school had changed a lot and thanks to the efforts of the new Principal and that the students were now more polite and happier than before. So, innovation and successful stories abound in CMI1 and CMI2. But there were still

problems and worries. Problems included severe education budget cuts, the decline of the school population, and school closures.

6.3. *An account of the interviews data and treatment*

Upon knowing the characteristics of the four case study schools, their popularity and the Principals' attitude toward changes, we may learn that Principals may take the chance of the interview to promote their schools and attempt to justify their own positions. In this section, I describe the interview situation, discuss the validity of the data, and explain how I have endeavoured to retain a critical perspective and to triangulate their reports with other pieces of evidence.

The interviews with the four school administrative staff (3 Principals and 1 Delegate teacher) were conducted in February-March 2003, at the time of the DP stage in the 2001-03 cycle. As mentioned in chapter 4, among the four interviews, the interview with CMI1, the delegate teacher, was the shortest. And the interview with the CMI2 Principal, on the other hand, was the longest. Generally, the interview relationships were friendly, especially with EMI2 Principal, sharing his conflict and difficulties under the reform with the researcher quoted in section 6.2.

However, the researcher acknowledged the fact that Principals might try to take the chance of the interview to promote the schools and the likelihood that Principals attempt to justify their own positions. Thus the researcher was cautious of the data obtained in the interview and used triangulation with data from other sources, such as parent interviews, school homepages, and newspapers, to ensure validity. I will tell

more about this in the later sections. I next present the findings on some institutional changes of the four case study schools.

6.4. *Improving school image and increasing publicity activities*

These changes include increasing publicity activities and building the school image. In the 2001 survey, parents said that they did not have enough information about secondary schools and that they did not attend any parent meetings or open days, because Secondary schools simply did not arrange those kinds of meetings for primary 6 children at that time. However, when I interviewed Principals, researched schools homepages and collected printed matter from schools in 2003, it confirmed that there were an increasing amount of publicity activities in the four case study schools.

Such activities included more communication with primary schools, parents and the public. The modes of communication included: the delivery of printed matter such as school bulletins, brochures...etc, organised school open days, parent nights, school anniversary variety shows, talent shows, concerts, English camps, conferences, seminars and a variety of differently-designed school homepages.

The school homepages were similar in that they aimed at building the school image on academic performance, school discipline/school ethos and extra-curricular activities. Of course, there was a difference in each school's banding and in the content of academic performance, but the emphasis was the same. Perhaps this is what parents and the government want from schools. It is true to say that some

schools have had such activities in the past, but not of this magnitude and with such momentum as at present. As the Principal of EMI 1 stated:

...Our communications with primary schools are gradually increasing. Starting from last year, we had an English day camp...one primary school joined our English day camp...They wanted to join...last year, we sent our Form I bulletin to the primary school. We introduced our educational philosophy and listed all our achievements in the bulletin...we organised a career talk, there were 500 to 600 primary school children who joined us. This year we have 600 to 700 children. This year, we also have our own school profile posted to the primary schools in the local school net.

Besides the increase of primary school children involved in the local school net, the promotion or the publicity activities of EMI1 also extend from the local school next to another school net:

We also posted to X (another school district). Our aim is to provide information of our school to the parents, so that they have enough information and can make a rational decision.

The school has a Public Relations Committee to organise all these:

We have a public relations committee which is responsible for all the information given to the public. For example, our Form I Bulletin. They are responsible for such information. We also have career talks, when we talk about higher education and further education. Since we give such talks to our students, then why not we give these talks to students from primary schools? So we organised such activities for primary schools in the local school net. We can also introduce our school to these primary schools.

The EMI1 Principal told the researcher that they have extra work because of the change of the choice policy. However, the Principal said that it was a response to a 'need' and a change in education ecology in Hong Kong, and not just for the sake of succeeding in the competitive education market. He stated that they are now not only

dealing with 10% of places as in the past, but with 20% of places and, of course, they need to publicise their school:

Obviously, we have extra work because of the change of the choice policy. But we use the existing committees to bear the extra work. But if you say this is caused by competition, it depends how you interpret it. There is a need. It's simple. In the past, there were only 8 or 10 places in the discretionary places system. But now it is 30 or more places. There is a great difference here. We don't bother to organise activities for only 10 persons. But now, it is 30 places, in our applications we have 250 applications. It's worth it to have more communication with them, to give more information to them, so that they can make a good choice. This is why we have a Form One Information Day. This is very important.

The number of persons involved is important...On the other hand, this is the change of education ecology. You can't deny it. This is not only a competition problem...Secondary school education ecology is very different now. I know that I need to tell parents our inclination, our orientation. I want them to have knowledge of our school before they choose.

In EMI2, the Principal also confirmed that there were lots of different kinds of publicity activities in the school:

Yes, we have publicity activities in several aspects. Firstly, the sports day, we invite all the primary schools in the school net to our sports day. Secondly, we deliver printed matters like school profile, school news...etc to all the primary schools within the area. Thirdly, every year we have a School Open Day, we have exhibitions and talent shows, we invite primary schools. Fourthly, I will go to the feeder primary school to introduce our school. Because it is our feeder school, 25% of our places are allocated to this primary school. Of course we hope that these 25% are the top students. This primary school and our school are in the same school governing body, so we have links.

In school CMI1, although only a few people applied for the DP, the school engages in publicity activities in the same way as EMI1 does:

Yes, we have school bulletins. We usually post them to the primary schools. We also use the school web-site to publicise our school. We will have our school Anniversary soon and will have lots of celebration activities in year 02-3. We will have lots of publicity activities to publicise our school to the local community and local primary schools.

We will have a talent show this Summer in the X City Hall. It's a variety show to let our children show their talents in front of their parents. We are preparing and organising it now.

The school also has a specialised committee to organise these activities and the whole school will participate in it:

Yes, we have a committee to organise these activities this year and the Principal is in charge of this committee. But many staff are involved in it. The PE teachers are responsible for the sport activities. The music teachers are responsible for the music activities. The whole school participates in it.

CMII wants the parents and public to know that the school is improving and that it has changed much of its school policy, for example, no tolerance towards school violence and destructive behaviour. It is, in fact, a strategy to build a better school image in the eyes of the public and here it seems that competition really can force the school, the provider, to improve. At least in behavioural terms, the school really is trying to improve and not just promoting a better school image by publicity activities:

We are thinking hard how to promote the school. We are undertaking great changes to promote our school. We have put great emphasis on students' behaviour outside the school. We hope to improve every aspect of our school, from academic performance, students' behaviour and discipline...etc. Eventually we hope we can improve our school and promote the banding so that parents like to choose our school.

We have curriculum changes. We design our own school-based curriculum in Chinese, in social subjects...etc. All these cater for the needs of our students. Our students generally are not very bright ones, they are band IV, V and even the bottom 10%. If the curriculum is too difficult for them, they lose their incentive to learn. This is why we cut some of our subjects and made things easier for our students. We want them to be happy in school. Our reform is very progressive, we are ahead of many other schools at the moment.

Regarding CMI2, despite the fact that CMI2 have no DP in school, they still wish to publicise their school. Indeed, the Principal and the staff are trying every method to improve their school image and publicise their successes. They know that building a better school image is very important, as parents like to choose school by word-of-mouth:

In the past, we didn't have publicity activities in primary school. This year, we have these activities. In fact, this year, many Principals and teachers from other schools have come to visit us. These include the local primary schools inside the school net. My colleagues, including myself, were invited to be speaker in a big seminar. We talked about the changes inside our school...Look, these are our achievements in big competitions.

Actually, our students have many achievements...But how do other people view us? The worst thing is they have their first impression. Our main difficulty is that many people don't know about all the current changes in the school...we are engaging in all these publicity activities. Besides the pamphlets for primary school, we know it's not the most effective way because parents won't look at it. They only ask which school is the best. People told them XXX is good, XX is good. Then they will go to that school.

The Principal welcomes all the changes in school and regards it as positive competition. However, although they have worked very hard to improve and have been recognised by the ED (now EMB) and other secondary schools, their intake in 2001 was still very low, as was their morale:

Certainly, competition, positive competition is good. It means everybody improves. Then we can change others' attitudes toward the school. In fact, I don't mind having poor achievers in our school. Really, I don't mind. Last year, in fact, our intake was not good. The problem mainly is the ED. I don't know how they plan and count. We used to have 4 Form I classes in the past. Last year, ED demanded that we have two more classes. In total, they wanted us to have 6 Form I classes. But eventually, our intake is very low this year...they didn't allocate enough students to us. I don't know how they plan and count. They demanded that we open 6 classes...As a result, this caused confusion in our school. Our morale was very low.

CMI2 Principal stated that the dramatic drop in intake of this school is caused by an over-supply of places at new schools and a low-birth rate in the school net. The school has undergone great changes and a number of students' former destructive behaviour has improved greatly under the new Principal. The Principal stated that the problem is that the parents of the primary 6 pupils have failed to acknowledge this type of improvement and so the Principal has to take every opportunity to publicise the school.

This piece of information was triangulated with parents' interviews. It is confirmed that generally students' behaviour has improved, for example: no vandalism, but the schools still have lots of other discipline problems. Regarding the decline of student population in this school net, it is confirmed with the policy maker from EMB during interview. For some of the achievements of the school and school staffs were invited as speaker to talk about their success, the Principal was able to provide the researcher with documentary evidence.

Regarding publicity activities and improving school image, from the above findings, we can now tell how different kinds of schools respond to competition and to their particular situation in the education market. Even though both the EM11 Principal and the policy maker denied that this was a response to competition, we can clearly see that all these changes have been initiated through competition. Of course, opinions will differ on whether such competition is a positive or negative move. The policy maker from the Education Commission saw competition as a positive change for the better. He stated that over-supply is a good thing in that it can help eliminate bad schools, as parents always choose school rationally:

It's because it's not popular that nobody wants to be in these kinds of schools. Why aren't they popular? It is because they are bad, not responsible. If you don't eliminate them, they will continue to exist...Generally, parents are objective, if you are good, parents still trust you. There is less possibility that if you are good and parents still not trusting you. In fact, the chances of elimination are very, very little. The number of band III schools that you can eliminate is still very, very little. If you don't have an oversupply, you have no way of eliminating this very small number of schools at all.

The CMI1 and CMI2 schools are working hard to improve and have made improvements, but can they survive in the education market in the future when many of the new schools have been built and when the student population is decreasing? Do the two schools have a survival space and still contribute to education in Hong Kong? Can competition always be 'positive'? We will learn more in section 6.7.

6.5. Changes in student recruitment in the four case study schools (01-03)

According to the survey carried out by the Sing Tao Newspaper in 2002 (27/11/02 Sing Tao Newspaper) on selection strategy, the increase in DP places from 10% to 20% in 2001 had a big impact on the schools selection in Hong Kong. There are different changes in school in response to competition and the reform policy. In this section, I will analysis changes directly related to marketing, including the number of discretionary place applications, the selection criteria and their arrangement.

Firstly, let us look at the number of Discretionary Places applications. As the policy increased the DP places in each school from 10% to 20% and will increase these further to 30% in 06, we can find that the number of DP application for EMI1 is also increasing (See table 6.4).

School CMI1 also has some discretionary place applications (See table 6.4). The researcher met a parent coming to the school for an application form on the day she interviewed the administrative staff of the school. However, the school is unwilling to reveal the actual number of DP applications, stating that it was confidential. CMI2 has no discretionary place application form, as no one bothers to apply there.

Table 6.4. Discretionary places by DP applications in the four schools

4 case study schools	02-03		01-02		00-01	
	Places	Applications	Places	Applications	Places	Applications
EMI1	30	270	32	250	32	250
EMI2	30	?	30	187	30	187
CMI1	?	?	?	?	?	?
CMI2	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL

Remarks: NIL means there are no discretionary place applications, while (?) means the school has discretionary place applications but is either unwilling or unable to reveal the data to the researcher.

Table 6.4 shows an increase in applications in the period 2000-03 in EMI1, and applications in EMI2 remained the same for two years. Unfortunately, EMI2 did not provide data for the 2002-03 cycle. Thus, we do not know whether there was an increase or there was a reduction. From this data, we can confirm that for more popular schools, for example EMI school, it is the school that chooses the student and not the parent who chooses the school. The evidence for this is that in year 2001-02 the chances of getting a DP place was 32/250 in EMI1 and 30/187 in EMI2. In the 2002-03 cycle, EMI2's slipping banding (become less popular) status I mentioned in table 6.1 may be the reason that the school did not provide such data, though I have no way to confirm it.

Of course, one could comment here that as well as the DP applications, parents can still choose schools through the CA, and this point was made by the policy maker

interviewed for the study. He said that in the CA everyone has formally the same chance and everyone has 30 choices. However, as have already stated in chapter 5, given the variations caused by the different information offered to parents and their differing abilities in making their choice in the first place, the chances of gaining entry to one's preferred school may not be as equal as what the policy maker stated. When we have some knowledge about how schools respond to competition, we can then find out about the kind of student likely to be selected and what problems and issues emerge from this.

With regard to the selection criteria of the DP in School EMI1 and EMI2 in 2001-03, both EMI and EMI2 Principals stated that it is clear that they have undergone some changes in recent years. The readers need to be informed that in 2001, no overt selection criteria were listed in the DP application form. Administrators in the four case study schools reported the changes in selection criteria from 2001 to 2003.

In year 2003 the application form of EMI1 and EMI2 (See table 6.5) included criteria such as conduct, extra-curricular activities/services, awards both inside/outside the school, the primary school's comments, as well as individual and group interviews. The selection procedure has changed from there being no interview to an individual interview in the recent past, while this year both individual and group interviews were being employed. In addition to academic requirements, it is now the case that good conduct and extra-curricular activities or services are required. Letters of reference and awards can also help achieve a successful outcome.

Table 6.5 Selection criteria of DP applications in 2003 in EMI1 and EMI2

	EMI1	EMI2
Academic standards	Total 60% 40% ED ranking-all subjects 20% in English subject	Overall ED ranking as reference
Conduct	5% Must be more than satisfactory	B and up
	Emphasis the importance of conduct bar	No mention of conduct bar
Extra-curricular activities/service	5%	Consider extra-curricular activities
	Requirement of one year participation of extra-curricular activities/service	No mention of extra-curricular activities/service as requirement
Others	10% Awards both inside/outside school, connection with school, primary school's comments	Primary school's reference letter, awards
Interview	20% About 100 students for interview. Selection is based on English fluency and problem solving ability	Interview details will be given to students who are qualified for an interview

*Data from DP Application Form and from interview with administrators in 03

Regarding the rationale for all these changes/strategy in selection, the Principal of EMI2 stated:

Yes, there is that dynamic here. We change according to different situations. The culture now is to run an education business. From this perspective, we need to decide what is necessary, what is our focus and then we plan a relevant strategy to tackle it. Of course we keep some of our good models and change others. For the selection process, we have changed a lot. In the past we only select according to academic performance, there was no interview or written test. Then we have interviews. And now we not only have individual interviews, we have group interviews to assess the student's ability. We not only select according to the ED's ranking. We also consider his personal achievement, extra-curricula activities and whether the student has a reference letter from the primary school. With all these procedures and criteria, we then decide whether to offer a place or not.

In EMI1, the Principal told the researcher that conduct is a very important criterion as only students with conduct A and B assessments can become prospective students. This is a kind of conduct bar. In this school, they emphasise discipline and school ethos. They have a school-wide policy to tackle behavioural problems. They even boast of their strict disciplinary policy as being their strong point on the school's homepage. This is very different from EMI2 where the school seems to have discipline problems and which has slipped from being a band I to band I-II school.

However, all these changes in strategy and selection procedures are not done without conflicting with the educators' educational philosophy. From the interview data with the Principals in February-March 2003, there is evidence that being an educator can conflict with their desire to compete for students from more affluent backgrounds.

The EMI1 Principal told me that:

Everybody knows that students from the middle class can afford violin lessons. They can afford the tuition fees. Do we want this kind of students in our school? We do. Everybody does, but this is not our educational philosophy. Our educational philosophy is to serve the neighbourhood. Most of the students in the neighbourhood are not middle class, they can't afford it.

The Principal of EMI2 also states that the school is forced to select students from better backgrounds through pressure from parents and the School Sponsor Body. He said that this is not his educational aim. His educational aim is to educate, irrespective of the students' abilities and backgrounds:

Basically, we give students' data to the ED. We don't know the academic ranking of each student after the scaling, only the ED has it. This is why we need to give the students' information to the ED and

have the ranking data from them. We hope to have the top list students. The reason is we hope to have good quality intakes...

This is just from the perspectives of running an educational business. Of course there are good things and bad things. From my point of view, this is not suitable. It should not be like that. The aim of education is to educate, no matter what kind of students. You know, everybody needs to be educated.

But now we have to face competition, we have to compete for students from better backgrounds. We now have to consider according to our situation. But from the educational aim, we have to educate. The student may not be very good now but he may be good in the future. We may need to spend extra time to educate the student.

But now the situation is parents want you to teach only good students, bad students have to go. They are afraid that their children may be affected by the bad students in school. Parents have their voice and we have to listen. We now have to announce our academic performance. People will say why is the performance so bad? How do you teach? Everybody is going in this direction.

The School Sponsor Body give you pressure from above. Every school has to compete. This is contradictory to our educational aim. National education must not be like that...

Besides, EMI2 Principal seemed very uneasy and powerless with all the pressures, difficulties and constraints to his education principles:

We have to build up our students, we have to spend time and energy to accomplish our educational aims. But as I have mentioned, now it's like running an educational business, we have to be cost effective and we now have many constraints and have to face all kinds of pressures. The one in power, the School Management Board, not everyone in it knows about education and has educational ideals. Their focus is different from mine. I have to be accountable to them and can't follow my own ideals. I have a conscience but nobody understands your conscience; there are so many difficulties.

6.6. Triangulation: selection criteria of other schools (Newspaper reports, school homepages & DP application forms analysis)

Besides the findings on selection strategy in the two EMI case study schools, in this section, I will present findings of selection criteria in other schools. The sources of

data include application forms and school homepages of some famous DSS (former aided schools) and newspaper reports in February and March 2003 during the DP stage.

It is found that large proportion of schools and especially EMI schools, still regard academic performance as the most important criterion in 2002-03 (27/11/02 Sing Tao Newspaper). However, compared with past years, it was found that extra-curricular activities were more emphasised than before. These include sport, music, dancing...etc. Among them, 22 EMI schools stated that extra-curricular activities contributed 20% or more in their overall selection criteria. If students have participated in extra-curricular activities in the past and have earned a certificate, or an award...etc, they have to bring with them to the interview (27/11/02 Sing Tao Newspaper). One very popular school openly specified what kind of sport the school would consider favourably. Some schools even add a physical fitness test and talent show for candidates skilled in playing the violin, piano or flute...etc in the course of the interview (27/11/02 Sing Tao Newspaper).

Besides the emphasis on extra-curricular activities, 60 secondary schools also demand a parental interview in the selection process, while 16 schools frankly confessed that the behaviour of parents might influence the selection outcome. The EMI and some DSS schools require interviews in English and if a parent can speak fluent English, it will certainly increase the chances of his/her child in securing a place. The newspaper concluded that the competition for places in EMI schools is very high (27/11/02 Sing Tao Newspaper).

In 2002-03, application forms of a few very popular DSS (former popular aided) schools, which recruited all their students through DP, were collected and analysed. It is found that they required a thorough student resume. One parent commented that the student resume was even more demanding than an adult one.

According to the report of Sing To newspaper on school selection criteria (27/11/02 Sing Tao Newspaper), if students and parents can express themselves in fluent English, the better the chance they have of securing places in the school. One would have thought it was the student's own ability that mattered most. However, a detailed student resume written by parents added to the requirement of interviewing the parents suggests that the middle class family is strongly favoured.

It is interesting to note that, the EMI1 Principal did not express conflict in selecting students as EMI2 Principal did, but instead strongly opposed the double standards of the selection criteria of aided schools and DSS schools. EMI1 Principal stated that on the one hand, DSS schools are allowed to use written tests for the selection of students while on the other hand aided schools are not permitted to use it. This kind of policy, as mooted by EMI1, reveals another double standard which, when added to the MOI policy, indicates that the government prefers DSS schools to aided schools:

They have this kind of policy. They shorten the academic distance between aided schools. And at the same time, they are promoting DSS schools, so that their academic achievement can become very popular. The reason is very simple, not because DSS schools are better than us aided school but because they have more freedom. They have more autonomy. We aided schools are controlled by the ED. They have the freedom to select students. They can have a written test. This is simply what I regard as conflicting policy.

He further stated that DSS schools receive tuition fee and it is not fair to students who could not afford it:

Maybe people think that I am too extreme. I don't deny that. But if you have money to pay the fees, then you can have the written test. You can not only choose one school, but you can choose more.

In the past, no matter whether you have money or not, you have one examination. But now, if you have money, you can choose the school. If you don't have money, you don't have this chance.

By favouring DSS schools over aided schools, the EMI Principal also accused the government of transferring education expenses to parents:

It's clear. There is no doubt about that. From my point of view, it is very clear. As a matter of fact, the government promotes DSS Schools. The burden on education is lessened. If you count the funding per capita, it is the same as the students in aided schools. However, if you count the teachers' pension scheme, the government can pay less. For aided schools, the government have to provide 10% -15% of the teachers' pension, but for DSS schools, the government only provides 5%. Therefore, the government, in this way, can pay less.

However, during the interview in 2003 the policy maker from EMB denied that the above accusations of transferring education expenses to parents were true and stated that some DSS schools are free, while aided schools and DSS schools are forbidden to use the written test in selecting students.

The policy makers were asked to comment on changes of selection criteria and criticisms that schools were selecting students from better backgrounds. The policy makers stated that they encourage diversified criteria as well as the requirement of multiple intelligence in selection. The policy maker from the EMB also stated that by increasing DP from 10% to 20% is good because the new DP policy can act as a mechanism for encouraging whole person- development in the primary sector.

This statement resonates with the new SSPA policy rationale in chapter 2 which stated in the Education Blueprint that the old policy put too much stress/pressure on the intellectual development of students, rather than on the development of their ethical, physical, social and aesthetic faculties. Furthermore, the EMB policy maker stated that the new policy also reinforces the policy of lifelong learning and generic skills: communication, team working, creative thinking...etc. that are needed in the knowledge economy in the 21st Education Blueprint (See chapter 1).

The policy maker stated that this kind of emphasis on multiple-intelligence rather than relying solely on academic performance for DP school selection can release pupils from unnecessary drilling on tests and can facilitate real learning in the primary school years:

In the past, we emphasised the memory kind of knowledge. But now, for the education reforms, we want to reform the curriculum in school to develop a lifelong learning attitude, to develop their generic skills, to develop their self learning ability in the future. Thus they can have life long learning. This is what we want to achieve from the increase of discretionary places in secondary schools. We hope that secondary schools select students not only on their academic performance but from different aspects of students, from their multiple intelligence.

For example, their sport and art ability, their social service aspect...etc. This kind of selection criteria can encourage primary schools to enhance whole person development. So we increase the discretionary places from 10% to 20% and encourage schools to use a diversified selection criteria, not only on academic performance...They also propose a further increase of the discretionary places from 20% to 30%. When this percentage is higher, this kind of multiple intelligence, diversified selection criteria will influence the teaching and learning in our primary school...

Whether the present procedures and arrangements really enhance this kind of learning in primary school education is still unknown and requires more research. However, one thing we can be sure from the finding in the four case study schools in

6.5 and selection criteria of other popular schools in 6.6, is that popular schools select students, rather than parents choose schools. Often popular schools, whether the Principals wanted to or were pressurised to, tended to select students from better backgrounds.

6.7. Changes in intake size

After this brief examination of the four schools' selection criteria in 6.5 and triangulation of findings of other schools' selection criteria in 6.6, it is now an appropriate time to come back and look at some of the changes in the enrolment size of the four case study schools (See table 6.6), which may illustrate the earlier impact of the SSPA on the four different case study schools. However, the use of cross-sectional data on enrolment to each form as a proxy for trend data on enrolment to Form 1 in successive years may not be totally accurate as they may be affected by dropout or recruitment after Form I.

Subject to this, there was an increase in the enrolment size over a period of three years in EMI1, EMI2 and CMI1. Enrolment in EMI1 increased by nearly 10% in two years. That means for 5 Form I classes, each class has 43 students. From the interview with the Principal in EMI1, we learned that the school employed a second round discretionary place application (informal arrangement) in July, after the announcement of the allocation result. The Principal stated that each Form I class can hold 43 students and their school has five Form I classes. Therefore, after allocated 40 students in each class by ED/EMB ($43-40=3$), the number of the so-called 'second round discretionary places' is five classes times three equals to fifteen. This explains

why they had 214 Form I students in 2001. In 2003 the number of applications for just 15 places in the second round totalled about 250. This gives us an idea of the intensity of Hong Kong students as they circulated in search of that vital school place.

Table 6.6 Enrolment size in 2003 from Form I to Form III of the four case study schools

4 case study schools	Form I enrolment			Form II enrolment			Form III enrolment		
	Inside	outside	total	Inside	outside	total	Inside	outside	total
EMI1	165	49	214	151	56	207	166	30	196
EMI2	168	31	199	172	25	197	166	25	191
CMI1	?	?	191	?	?	147	?	?	142
CMI2	69	1	70	117	3	120	199	18	217

Remarks: CMI1 refused to give information on outside and inside school net data

There was an increase in EMI2's numbers, but they never exceeded 200. It reached a peak of 199 in 2001, meaning that the class size would not exceed 40. Different schools employ different strategies in recruitment and have different views regarding large class sizes. This is because the number of EMI schools is limited, although there are very favourable factors that may influence parents in choosing them. This certainly reveals something interesting regarding school response, strategy and belief in the competitive nature of the system. For example, what is seen as a gain in some schools may be regarded as a loss in others. Is a large class size a gain for a school or is it a gain for the students in that school? This controversial issue is certainly worth debating.

There was also an increase in CMI1's school enrolment that year (142, 147, 191). This was due to an increase in the migration of people to a newly developed area next to the CMI1 school district/net and thus a larger number of students were allocated to the school. At the moment the government is building new schools in the newly developed area, although building has not finished yet. Once the building is finished, CMI1's survival may be at stake as it is a band III school. Proximity and a new school campus certainly are attractive factors as parents indicated during interviews and local parents may prefer the new schools with new campus facilities. There is also a gender imbalance in CMI1, particularly since the court case of 2001 was won, which brought about the abolition of different treatment of boys and girls in 2002. However, in CMI1 the number of boys (121) is nearly double that of the number of girls (71). The school administrative staff indicated that this has caused discipline problems within the school.

In the past, they used to have four Form I classes, but in this year, they were arranged by the government into five Form I classes. That explains the increase in the enrolment numbers from 147 the previous year to 191 in the year I am researching. However, how many students were allocated to the school and how many moved to other schools is unknown as that data was unavailable. The administrative staff stated that once the building of the new schools is completed, the EMB will allocate a number of students to the new schools instead of to CMI1. Places in the school net of CMI1 will then be over-supplied. That means that school CMI1 may face a threat to its survival in the near future. The administrative staff told the researcher that they may face very tough competition and there may be a dramatic drop in school

enrolment by that time. This is why they are working vigorously to improve the school reputation and to build a positive school image.

CMI2 has experienced a dramatic drop in numbers (217, 120, 70). Both Principal and parents indicated that the school has improved a lot over the last four years. But its bad reputation in the past, the decrease of the student population in general, the advent of new schools in the neighbouring school net and the banding of the school all account for the sudden drop in school enrolment in 2001. The school Principal stated that the ED (now EMB) and some other secondary schools have acknowledged and recognised the improvement in the school. In fact, members of their staff were invited to speak in a seminar about the school's success. In 2001, when the ED (now EMB) planned to allocate 6 classes of students to CMI2, the school staff were shocked at the low turn-up rate. According to the Principal, the morale of staff in the school is now very low as a result.

Fortunately, the government still gave the full funding for 6 Form I classes to the school so that the school manages to have a very small class size and can employ resources for different kinds of innovations. The school really took advantage of this generosity by the government and improved throughout the year. The school also plans to improve the school building and facilities in the school. But the Principal also worries about the future. Will they, for example, still have enough funding in the future when the intake size continues to drop? The school's survival may come under threat. This is the case with CMI2 this year as there is an over-supply of places in the school net stated by CMI2. This data is confirmed with data from other source: namely the policy maker from ED/EMB and from Principals of other schools.

In 2005, I learned that no Form I students were allocated to CMI2 and that the Principal of CMI2 left the school in 2005-06.

The readers should be informed that one of the policy makers stated that more supply than demand is a good thing as the bad schools could then be eliminated. However he denied that over-supply is the government's policy. He said:

Parents know how to choose better schools, their eyes are sharp...But in fact, it is good if there is an oversupply of places...The good thing is we can eliminate some very bad schools. If you get students no matter if you are good or not, you have no incentive to improve. But elimination and over-supply is not the aim of the government. The government just wants to save money. They don't want an over- supply. But from my point of view, over-supply is good as we can eliminate some schools...It's because it's not popular, nobody wants to be in these kinds of school. Why aren't they popular? It's because they are bad, not responsible. If you don't eliminate them, they will continue to exist.

6.8. School enrolment social composition and the issue of equality

As equality of access is one of the main concerns of this thesis, measuring and comparing the social characteristics of school enrolment is therefore vital. However, school Principals stated that the school did not have any data on parental occupation, parental income and parental education. All such data is regarded by the school as being very personal and contentious, especially as the unemployment rate has risen due to the economic crisis in Hong Kong over the last few years. The researcher also tried to obtain information from EMB, but was refused as 'no such information is available'. The only data the researcher acquired is the sampling data from the respondents who were willing to answer questions on their educational level in the parental survey of 2001. Without a few years' data, it is difficult to compare and ascertain the changes over time. In the UK the number of free meals in schools is

used as an indicator of the social composition of the school enrolment, so the researcher asked the four schools for data on the number of textbook allowances and the number of private musical instrument lessons. Fortunately, the schools were co-operative and gave the data on these two items: receipt of a textbook allowance (See table 6.7) and music lessons, though they must be classed as imperfect indicators.

Table 6.7. Enrolment social characteristics I (100% textbook allowance-data collected in February-March in 2003)

Number of students received allowance/ Total enrolment	100% textbook allowance in Form I (2002-03)		100% textbook allowance in Form II (2001-02)		100% textbook allowance in Form III (2000-01)	
	N/Total	%	N/Total	%	N/Total	%
EMI1	20/214	9.3	23/207	11.1	27/196	13.7
EMI2	16/199	8	19/197	9.6	16/191	8.4
CMI1	27/191	14.1	21/147	14.2	20/142	14.1
CMI2	6/70	8.6	10/120	8.3	38/217	17.5

Although textbook allowance is not a perfect measure of the social characteristics of students, it is the only available data that I can use to compare the four schools and the changes to the school social intake over the period of three years. Ideally, it is better to have details of parental occupation, income and education level as a means of measurement. However, at present, one has to accept it as a limitation of the research.

Families with a total income of under \$ 19747 (about 1463 pounds) yearly, are eligible for a 100% textbook allowance. Families with a total income of between \$19748 to \$52737 (about 1463 to 3906 pounds) yearly are eligible for a 50%

textbook allowance. Any parent's household yearly income limit falls in the category are eligible and there is not any quota in each school.

Students who have a 100% textbook allowance generally come from very poor, deprived families. The changes in the social enrolment characteristics of those with a 100% textbook allowance are as follows (See table 6.7): In EMI1 students from deprived families in its intake is decreasing. In EMI2 its intake from deprived families dropped from 9.6% to 8%. In 2001, the intake of students from deprived families reached a rate of 9.6%, the highest recorded over the 3-year period.

So CMI1 did not seem to change much, although it is higher than that of EMI1 and EMI2. CMI 2's students from deprived families is high in Form III, but not in Form I and II when compared to the other three schools.

Table 6.8. Enrolment social characteristics II (outside private musical lessons & others—musical instrument learn inside schools)

4 case study schools	Form I			Form II			Form III		
	Piano	Violin	Others	Piano	Violin	Others	Piano	Violin	Others
EMI1	?	7	27	?	6	28	?	0	27
EMI2	?	?	?	18	0	15	10	11	7
CMI1	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
CMI2	0	0	10	0	0	15	0	0	5

Remarks: ? means the school did not have the data or was unwilling to reveal the data to the researcher.

The number of students who have private musical instrument lessons in school may, to a certain extent, reflect some sense of social class, but it is an imperfect indicator. On the one hand, since such lessons are private, the school may simply not have the information and therefore the data may not be very reliable. On the other hand,

whether one has musical instrument lessons depends not only on the family's financial situation but also depends on the student's interests, talent and incentive to learn.

In EMI2, 18 students learned piano and 11 learned violin. In EMI1, 13 learned violin while no students learned piano. If we use the number of students taking private musical lessons as an indicator, from the data above, it seems students in EMI2 are a little bit better off than those in EMI1 (See table 6.8).

In CMI1 and CMI2 no one at all takes private musical lessons. However, we should bear in mind that the indicator is imperfect and may also be highly invalid, thus no conclusions can be drawn. Furthermore, taking into account the economic depression of the last few years and population shift in that period, any change in the social composition of enrolment may or may not be due to the impact of the SSPA.

After presenting the findings that address the fourth and fifth research sub-questions: How do schools with different popularity, respond to the changes in the SSPA? And how the new SSPA impacts on schools with different popularity? In the next chapter, the writer will present the findings which address the third and sixth sub-research questions: how parents comment on the detailed changes in the SSPA and the quasi-market reforms from their perspective, and how Principals of schools with different popularity and different competitive positions in the education market comment on the SSPA and quasi-market reforms.

Chapter 7 Attitude toward the SSPA and quasi-market reforms

7.1. Introduction

This chapter presents findings which address the third and sixth sub-research questions: namely, how parents comment on the detailed changes in the SSPA and the quasi-market reforms from their perspective, and how Principals of schools with different popularity and different competitive positions in the education market comment on the SSPA and quasi-market reforms. Policy-makers' reactions to comments of parents and Principals will also be presented.

The framework of this chapter is as follows. First, findings on the comments regarding the two changes in the DP policies will be presented in 7.2. Second, different perspectives on the abolition of tests and the new scaling system will be presented in 7.3. Third, findings on different perspectives of band cutting, the increase in the random factor, mixed ability teaching, information on aided school adaptation, government support and on the idea of comprehensive education will be presented in 7.4. Overall assessment of the SSPA, will be presented in 7.5. Finally, a conclusion on parents and school administrators' attitude toward the SSPA and the quasi-market reform will be drawn in section 7.6.

7.2 Individual choice and school selection—views toward increase of DP schools and DP places

To begin with we will look at how parents view the increase in DP places from 10% to 20% in 2001. From the findings, we can conclude that most parents (81%) welcome this change. Out of the 281 who answered the open question (See table 7.1 below), 142 parents (50.5 %) explained that they liked the increased number of DP places because it could increase their chances of securing a DP school, while 100 other parents stated that it was good that schools could select students.

Table 7.1 Explanation of parents' comments on increase of DP places from 10% to 20%

<i>Parents' explanation</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Good, more choice and chance for better school	142	50.5
Good, school can select students with similar ability, higher standard	100	35.6
Not fair, relation may influence selection	15	5.3
Not right, it is elitism similar to the past AAT elimination	5	1.8
Not good, better give the places back to central computer allocation	14	5
I do not know, not clear about the policy	1	.4
Not fair, no transparency and standard of criteria of selection	4	1.4
Total	281	100

However, as most parents welcomed the increase of DP places and regarded it as increasing freedom and choice, EMII Principal regarded the policy as contradictory:

I welcome this trend. This is just a first attempt. But I have to say, I welcome this trend passively. The reason is this is a policy full of

contradictory elements. You move 5 bands into three bands to increase mixed-ability. But on the other hand you increase discretionary to encourage selection. This is a contradictory and conflicting policy. This is silly!

He further commented about the changes in policy as giving parents false choice:

The Secondary school choice policy emphasises the increase of parental choice. They said this is empowerment...So the discretionary will increase to 30%. You can choose, but how? This is a false choice.

Another proposed DP change is that in future parents can make a second choice of DP school. In general, parents (88.7%) in the survey welcomed this. Out of the 234 parents who explained their answer (See table 7.2), 89.7%, stated that it increase more chance, hope and choice while other 10% view the other way.

Table 7.2 Explanation of parents' comments on increase of one more DP school

<i>Parents' explanation</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Good, more chance, hope and choice	210	89.7
No, not fair	5	2.1
No, depend only on academic	2	.9
More school means more stress and confusion	17	7.3
Total	234	100

Though CMI2 Principal, told the researcher that parents were blind in choosing school and stated that the SSPA reform did not give parent real choice but 'false' choice.

7.3. Attitude toward streaming —views toward abolition of tests

When I asked parents and school administrators about their views on the abolition of tests, parents generally welcomed the abolition of tests: 64% considered that it was ‘good’, with little variation across parents at different educational levels.

Table 7.3. Parents’ comments on the abolition of tests

	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (include postgraduate)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Good	68	64.1	267	64.1	106	64.2	441	64.2
Not good	38	35.9	149	35.9	59	35.8	246	35.8
Total	106	100	416	100	165	100	687	100

Chi-square:3.149,df:4, (statistically not significant)

Those who welcomed it explained that the AAT was problematic with regard to streaming, as it was stressful and hindered real learning in primary schools. Those parents who did not welcome the abolition of tests explained that tests were good for streaming and that they increased motivation and competition (See table 7.4). However, many of the parents agree with the abolition of test just because they thought the test itself is problematic, not the streaming of students into different bands.

Some parents also complained that the policy had changed too quickly. Abolition came suddenly without much thought given to planning and to the arrangement of the new mechanism for their replacement. In addition, the new scaling system that replaced the abolition of tests proved to be very problematic. Some primary schools that welcomed lots of new immigrants from China over the past three years experienced lower test scores as a result.

Table 7.4 Explanation of parents' comment on abolition of test

<i>Parents' explanation</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Good, less burden and stress	164	36.9
Good, the questions in this test are problematic	83	18.7
Good, more time for real learning	31	7
Good, the test is useless	17	3.8
Not good, test is good for streaming	118	26.5
Not good, test is good for competition	15	3.4
Not good, no test is difficult to match children and school	11	2.5
We need to find another better test	1	.2
The policy change too rapidly	4	.9
No matter what and how to change, the education in HK is a failure	1	.2
Total	445	100

Parents commented that the new scaling system was not fair and that it was not a valid way of streaming primary students' performances. Furthermore, as this was the first year that this scaling system had been used, many teachers were unfamiliar with it and estimated the children's banding incorrectly. This caused confusion. All these comments reveal that parents were more concerned about the problematic streaming mechanism this year than the long-term result of the real learning the policy maker overtly addressed by abolition of the test. Hong Kong parents, to a certain extent are used to the streaming created long time ago by the government.

The three school administrators of EMI2, CMI1 and CMI2 also welcomed the abolition of the tests. But the school Principal of EMI1 questioned their abolition and worried about the consequences in the future. The Principal worried that the standard

in aided schools would be lowered if there were no public measurement to assess school performance in the future:

...we need a standardised assessment to measure students' academic achievement... For me, I hope they have some measure to evaluate students' academic achievement, a standard one.

As a result of this kind of policy, the effect will be seen after 3 to 5 years. Every school will be the same, there will be no difference. Whether you work hard or not, one third of your students will be in band I and one third will be in band III. In the long term, the consequences can be easily seen. In the past in China, whether you work or don't work, you earn the same kind of salary. You cancel public assessment. No matter whether I teach or not, one third of my students will be band I. You can see what kind of development will come as a result of this kind of policy.

What makes me feel so disappointed is the government has given up any standard measure. They cancel all the public examinations, no matter whether in primary 6 or in secondary.

He stated that the belief 'whether you work or not, you earn the same kind of salary' is damaging as he worries that people will lose the incentive to work hard due to bureaucratic inefficiency.

In the interview, the policy maker of the EMB argued that there will be the BCA (Basic Competence Assessment) in the future and that this public measurement will be better than any public examination in measuring school performance. The policy maker from the EC also stated that a school with lower standards than the basic requirements is irresponsible and that it is the government's responsibility to guarantee a good quality of education in Hong Kong schools.

Some parents also expressed concern that the school choice situation will also be transferred to primary school allocation or, even earlier, to nursery.

The policy maker from EMB stated that the government put forward the through train policy that links secondary schools with primary schools in encouraging continuity and real learning in the nine years of basic education. However, in 2001, the so-called through train policy was not popular for a variety of reasons.

As well as this policy, the policy maker from the EC also told the researcher that their aim is to create a 'Neighbourhood School' and 100% discretionary goal in the future. This means that a student's address will be linked to the school's catchment area and will no longer need a future central allocation but with 100% discretionary.

7.4 Attitude toward elitism and comprehensive education—views towards cutting of bands and mixed ability

When parents were asked about their feelings about the cutting of 5 bands to 3, more parents stated that it was not good (See table 7.5).

Table 7.5. Parents' comments on cutting 5 bands to 3

	primary		secondary		Secondary 6 and above (including postgraduate)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Good	32	30.8	129	31.5	44	27.7
Not good	72	69.2	280	68.3	114	71.7
Total	104	100	409	100	158	100

Chi-square: 1.673, df: 4, (statistically not significant)

When asked to explain why (See table 7.6), 151 (44.3%) out of 341 said it caused confusion and that it was difficult to match the child to a school. Another 112 parents regarded the change as being problematic as it could lower the quality or the status of popular schools. How this would have happened may be due to the mix of ability caused by such change. Furthermore, 29 out of 341 explained that it was good

because it could shorten students' distance among schools with different popularity. 19 parents stated that the cutting allowed them to obtain good school places. From this data, it seems parents are more concerned with their individual right of choice than the comprehensive (mixed ability) idea of education, though only 10 parents addressed directly that mix-ability is not good in their explanation of their comment to this question.

Table 7.6. Explanation of parents' comments on the cutting of bands from 5 to 3

<i>Parents' explanation</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Good-more chance to get into good school	19	5.6
Good-distance of students shortened	29	8.5
Not fair, causes confusion, difficult to match right school	151	44.3
Not good, band 1 students more, but band 1 places the same, competition	7	2.1
Not good-influence/lower quality & name of school	112	32.8
Not good-teaching mixed ability is difficult	10	2.9
Not good-in short term, long term is good, but needs more provisions	1	.3
Not good-decrease choice	8	2.3
No band is good. Let school choose	4	1.2
Total	341	100

It is also interesting to note that the lower their level of education, the more likely they were to feel that the cutting of bands was confusing (53.1%, 43.1%, 29.9%). The higher the educational level of the group, the more likely they were to worry about the effect on quality or the reputation of the school (48.1%, 31.5%, 20.4%).

However, the number of parents in the table is small and may not represent all Hong Kong parents' views.

In an interview, one parent even preferred more streaming and increased elitism:

I think the more the streaming, the better it is. If you change 5 bands into 3 bands, the difference between each band becomes lesser and lesser. It's very difficult for the school to teach. It's easy to teach students with similar ability. If their ability varies very much, it's difficult to teach. Teachers then may lower their standards. For the poor ones, the standard may not be suitable for them. But for the able ones, the standard may be too low. I think elitism is good.

For another parent thought that the change of bands decreased her chance:

For the change of 5 bands into 3 bands, it certainly decreases my chance. It decreases the fairness too.

The Principal of CMI2 stated that with the changing of bands and the effect of random factor, this, added to the new scaling system and the inexperience of primary staff, has really caused problems and confusion this year. It explains why there were so many appeals cases in the 2001 allocation.

According to the two policy makers, the cutting of bands is necessary to increase mixed-ability education in schools so that education becomes more comprehensive.

On the other hand, the school administrators of EMI1 and EMI2 really felt the impact of mixed-ability education in their schools. As mentioned previously, the EMI1 administrator worried that the standard of aided schools may be lowered due to mixed-ability teaching as he felt that it was difficult for teachers to cater for students of different abilities.

EMI2 has already been influenced by it in terms of student behaviour and by their subsequent method of tackling it. Their banding dropped from Band I to Band I-II in 2002-3. Readers need to be reminded again that there is no official banding of school, the banding in Hong Kong schools are created by the school choice process. The policy maker from the ED stated that they have not abandoned schools with adaptation problems but that they are concerned with how schools adapt to the demands of mixed-ability teaching and will evaluate the situation in the new SSPA in 2004.

The Principal of EMII stated that the impact is not only academic, but has a behavioural aspect as well:

This is a great backward step and is contradictory. As a result of mixed ability, not only the academic level will be lower, but the behaviour level will be lower too. The point is, as a researcher, if you want me to prove this to you, this is close to impossible. How can you prove the causal relationship? There are so many variables.

His main concern is that mixed-ability teaching may lower the standard in the school:

Of course, there is. You can easily see. The effect is not only academic. It includes behavioural aspects too. If you want statistical evidence, we can't give you any. What I can tell is very simple. How many students fail in one subject? How many students fail in two subjects? How many students fail in three subjects? I discovered that there is a tendency for an increase in the number of students who fail in many subjects. Although in the past, academic achievements were not very stable, sometimes low, and sometimes high. But this year, it is worse. Is this caused by the reforms, as a careful researcher, I can't jump to conclusions. But I think the effect is sure.

However, another parent thought mixed-ability teaching was good for her son's confidence:

Therefore I think mix ability is not a bad thing. In my son's case, he was happy in class B with children who performed lower than he did. My son was very happy because he was always the best in his class. If he were in class A, he would have been the worst in the class. But in class B, he was the first, therefore he gained more confidence because of that.

The policy makers stated that they wanted to reduce the labelling effects of streaming and regard the cutting of 5 bands into 3 as a solution. But the Principal of EM11 stated that the cutting would not avoid streaming in class/groups or the labelling effect on one's life. He argues that the sooner people have an adequate evaluation of them and learn how to deal with this the better it will be. He believes this is one of the functions of education:

I think 5 bands are better. An interesting point is the mixed ability. When you put students with different levels together in one school, naturally, you want to stream them into different classes. We don't want to waste able students' talent. We want to help them to develop their potential fully. We want to give them this chance. It is natural to put them into one class. Teachers usually care for the less achiever. If the range of ability is too great in one class, bright students may feel very bored while the less able students can't understand or grasp anything.

Many people argue that you don't need to tell someone his position so early, when he grows up and starts work, he will know. But the point is if you want him to know, want him to accept, you have to tell him earlier...I don't think giving students their academic achievement position is wrong. Sooner or later, you have to tell them. This is unavoidable.

In short, one can say, some educators are similar to some parents, concern more of their individual schools' competitive position, hold on to their opinion toward streaming and resist to the change.

7.5. Overall comments of the SSPA and the quasi-market reforms

When asked to comment on the new system as a whole, parents were divided, with a majority preferring the old system to the new one. The higher the educational level of parents, the more likely they were to prefer the old system (See table 7.7).

Table 7.7. Parents' comments on the old and new systems (Q2.12)

	Primary		Secondary		Secondary 6 and above (includes postgraduate)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
New is better	42	48.8	124	42.6	41	38.3
Old is better	43	50	162	55.7	64	59.8
Both are not good enough	1	1.2	5	1.7	2	1.9
Total	86	100	291	100	107	100

Chi-square: 2.228, df: 4, (statistically not significant)

The lower the educational level of the group, the more likely they were to prefer the new system. Only a very small percentage of parents replied that both old and new systems were not good enough. When use chi-square to test the association, it is statistically not significant.

Table 7.8 Explanation of parents' comments on the old and new systems

Parents' explanation	F	%
Old is better, fair, according to academic level, no confusion	100	61
Old is better, clear of school banding	8	4.9
New is better, more chance	41	25
More place for discretionary is better	4	2.4
Both are not good	10	6.1
Total	163	100

When parents were asked to explain their answer (See table 7.8), majority of parents stated that old is better because it is according to academic level, no confusion and

clear of banding. Minority of parents stated that new is better because it offers them more chance. Some even mentioned that the increase of discretionary places makes it better. From all these evidence, we can say that Hong Kong parents are more concerned with individual right of choice than with comprehensive education.

The school administrator of EMI1 stated that the new SSPA is a contradictory policy. On the one hand he claimed it increased mixed-ability teaching by cutting the number of bands, implying that it is now more comprehensive. On the other hand, it increased the number of DP places as schools competed to select more able students, and therefore was more elitist and could not be termed comprehensive. EMI2 Principal stated that the school was forced to select and that was opposite to his education principle. For the CMI2 Principal who seemed to embrace the reform, the policy did not increase choice. The administrator in CMI1 agreed that the school needs to change in order to survive and that the school welcomes the changes.

When asked whether the new SSPA dealt with equality issues as parents with different education level may have different ability to make school choice, the policy maker from EC told the researcher that the government did not seem to take notice of equality issues in the SSPA. The policy maker from EMB stated that every parent has 30 choices and he denied any inequality issue in the process.

Regarding the quasi-market reform as a whole, both parents and Principals were sceptical. Firstly, comments on whether the reform is leading to a bright future and benefits the students. EMI1 Principal, as already mentioned, was very sceptical, very selective and even questioned the legitimacy of the reforms. The EMI2 School

Principal, on the other hand, stated that all these dramatic changes brought many problems with implementation. Schools and parents, therefore, needed to take time to learn and adapt to them:

Firstly, all these changes have brought so many impacts. In this stormy period, we have to stabilise our team building. Then in the next step, we need consensus and planning can follow. If you don't have consensus you can't change. These are the pre-conditions in reforms. If nobody knows about the future, even the educators are not sure...They print out many booklets e.g. learning to learn, how to be an administrator, curriculum guides...etc. I tell you, they give out so many booklets, so much information, You can see them...there are piles and piles of them like mountains.

From my point of view, if we have a thorough plan and have all the support provision, then OK let's do it. But now it's like changing the soup without changing the medicine. You only tackle part of the problem but not the whole problem. This is my own evaluation.

When faced with criticism and obstacles, the government changed plans several times, an approach that the EMI2 Principal now questions:

If you change all the time and don't have persistency and confidence, it's not going to work...If you have problems and asked them, they don't provide any definite answers... You can see they don't have any answer and don't even know where they are heading...Another element to success is consensus. Right now, it's difficult to have consensus.

He continued and stated they were like blind men who did not know what the future holds:

We are like blind men, we don't know what the future holds. Under these circumstances, parents don't have confidence. There are so many changes in policies, great changes. We must have a period to adjust. You can't say we have made improvements. We have to readjust everything, we have to take time to think over everything, to adjust. How to adjust in policy changes, how to encourage teachers to participate in these changes - they are the front-line workers, you know. How to adjust in the mentality aspect. All these organisational changes, all these ideas and philosophy...etc. This is why nobody knows what the future holds.

The EMI2 Principal stated that it was difficult to evaluate whether the innovations were good for students and said that opinions are always one-sided:

Oh, I tell you it is difficult to evaluate. Firstly, who will conduct research to find out the truth? There are always one-sided opinions.

However, CMI1 administrator viewed it differently. The administrator (delegate teacher) said that all the changes were beneficial for students and that school welcomed these changes:

I think all these changes are good for our students. We have lots of new changes in school. You know, we are a band III school. We are not popular and if we don't change for the better, students won't come in the future. Especially after all the new schools finish building, a large number of students will select schools in Yuen Long and not here. We will then be in danger of closing down. We welcome all these changes, it's good for our school in the future. Of course, teachers' workload has increased. All the teachers have to work very hard but we think we need to improve our school. We welcome all these changes. As the world is changing, we have to teach relevant knowledge to our students and adapt to the new environment.

He added:

Under these adverse conditions and given that our school is an unpopular one, we have to improve in order to survive. The changes are unavoidable.

The CMI2 Principal stated that the changes were a challenge and if the school was given enough time, it was possible that it would solve all its problems:

For me, it is a good challenge. We face so many problems now. We have tried to solve all these problems. For example, we want to improve our campus, the building, our teaching methods, our extra-curricular activities, and our teacher management. We now have goals to aim for. We have direction. Given time, it is possible for us to solve all our problems. We have already seen many changes in our school.

However, regarding the future of the school, the Principal also worried about budget cuts, funding and the intake size of the school in the future:

Frankly, I think they will cut funding. We aided schools are very passive. We can't collect funding from other channels. We can't have sponsors from other channels. Our chance is very weak. Therefore we can only depend on the government to give us funding. But given the poor economic situation in Hong Kong, I am certain that they will cut funding. If they announce that, then we have to react and plan. We must have our own strategy to respond to the situation.

The demand for places in XX School Net has decreased, and in the future the demand in this school net will be decreasing too. The reason is the low birth rate in Hong Kong. Now the problem is very serious in primary schools. After a few years, secondary schools will face the same problem, although for secondary schools, the ED counts it as Hong Kong-wide. But who knows the outcome? As I have said, they demanded that we open two more classes but in the end we didn't have enough students.

When I asked parents for their opinions on the reforms and on the quality of education in the future, a number of parents said that they did not have any confidence in them and that they were not sure about the quality of education in the future.

Both parents and educators had strong feelings about the speed of change and adaptation. Parents held the same view as the EMI1 and EMI2 Principals that change had come too suddenly:

I think there are too many changes now. It causes confusion. I think there are too many changes at the moment and they are changing things quickly. Many policies have been in practice for a long time and we have benefited from them so there is no need to change. The changes also cause confusion to the schools, parents and students.

One parent commented that if the policy is always in a state of change, it just causes a decline in Hong Kong standards, not an increase:

My comments on the future of Hong Kong education... If the government keeps on this trend, I am really not optimistic... If the policy

always changes, it just cause decline in the Hong Kong standards, not an increase...I suggest that if there is any change of policy, don't change it suddenly, but change it slowly in longer term. If there is any change, don't change for short-term results, change it according to longer term, for a more broader, overall view. My impression now is that all the changes are for quick, short-term results. They don't allow for a thorough and overall consideration. I can't give you very concrete example. I am not an expert.

This parent also stated that under the reforms, the concept of responsibility in schools had changed quickly and that teachers were different from those in the past:

I am not optimistic. The concept of responsibility in schools has changed quickly. The teachers are very different from the past. In the past, teachers had the ambition of educating our younger generation. But now, they teach because it's just a job. They don't spend much time in caring and understanding the children. It's not good for the students.

Thirdly, generally, parents did not favour the MOI policy that differentiates EMI and CMI schools. One parent did not have much confidence in the future, especially in the present MOI policy in schools:

I worry...I think it's not ok compared with the past...The reforms are not good. They distinguish between EMI and CMI. It's not good. Every subject is in Chinese. It's not good. For those who can't get into EMI, it's not good. This is why I was very concerned whether my son could get into an EMI school or not. English is international, Mandarin is not international.

Another parent commented that the reforms had failed to achieve their aims and he did not agree with the present MOI policy either. Regarding the encouragement of multiple intelligence and the all round development taking place in schools during the reform, he argued that his son's school was too small and that there was not enough sports places for students:

I don't agree with the mother tongue instruction policy. I like both English and Chinese teaching. I don't look down upon the poor achiever, no. I think we need to teach according to their ability... They pay too much emphasis to academic achievement. This is related to the parents but you just can't stop it. If you want your child to get into a band 1 school, you have to drill them to achieve better results academically. Then you lose sight of other aspects... There is a quota in the sports club. The fact is that the school building is small. There is a limitation on space.

Fourthly, regarding parents' knowledge and confidence about the reform. One parent who said that she knew very little about education or the reforms, but she was aware of the pressure on teachers and of the confusion they felt. She also stated that government officers send their own children abroad to study because they themselves do not have confidence in the reforms:

I know little about it. But I can feel the confusion. I have friends who are teachers. It's hard for them. They need to look after the children and at the same time need to spend extra time attending training courses. They have a lot of pressure. I don't think the government has confidence in Hong Kong education themselves. Many officers send their own children to study overseas. If they had confidence in Hong Kong education, they would have let their children study in Hong Kong. Why do they need to send their children overseas.

One parent commented that we need to teach students in terms of practical knowledge and added that she does not think the present reforms have achieved their aims:

We need to teach them knowledge that is useful. You can't teach them knowledge that is not useful, not practical in this modern world. I think this is the way to create manpower... I don't think the reform has achieved these aims.

The policy maker in the EMB rebutted the claim that parents send their children overseas:

I think they must have a strong argument to back up their claim... I understand that when there is reform, there is always resistance to change. Whenever there is change, there must be an impact and people need to adapt to the changes. In Hong Kong, there isn't any increase

in the supply of international school places. There is a lot of gossip, but such claims are without foundation.

However, the policy maker from the EC stated that those parents, by sending their children to international schools or overseas were rendering a vote of no-confidence in public education in Hong Kong. He said this was an alarming situation for the public schools in Hong Kong, particularly as many of these schools are below standard. He argued that DSS school policy could change the present situation and provide parents with different choices and a better quality of education. And this is the rationale behind the DSS school policy:

Actually, this phenomenon is a vote of no confidence in Hong Kong education. From my point of view, this is a big drawback to the education in Hong Kong. On the one hand, public schools haven't changed much over these years... Nowadays, students learn a lot of impractical and unusable knowledge. This actually is an alarm call for the public schools in Hong Kong... But parents have an outlet. The USA has started the Charter school. Teachers and parents can gain a Charter if they have a fresh educational philosophy that is convincing enough. Then the government will give you money to open your own school. The contract is only for two years. If after two years, your quality of education is not coherent with your educational philosophy, then you have to return the money. That means you have to close the school. This kind of mechanism can ensure that the quality of education in public schools is above the basic standard and not below it. It can be an outlet for parents too. This is in fact the rationale behind DSS school policy.

7.6. Conclusion of views of educators and parents

In this section, I will draw a conclusion on the overall views of parents and educators toward the reforms mentioned above.

Over all, the majority of parents welcomed the changes in DP, abolition of test and cutting of bands from 5 to 3. However, from the analysis of parents' explanation of their comments and the data from interviews with parents, it seems that generally,

Hong Kong parents care more of their individual right of choice than the idea of comprehensive education. From parents' response to school selection, it seems parents still favour elitism over comprehensive idea.

For the four school administrators, the two CMI educators seemed to welcome the changes while the two EMI educators felt the pressure to select students. The Principal of EMI2 did not favour selection whilst the Principal of EMI1 disliked mixed-ability teaching and believed that school standards would lower with the absence of testing. He even criticised the policy changes as contradictory and argued that they did not really increase choice of parents. Both parents and educators, after their experience of the early impact of the reform, generally did not have much confidence in the future. In the next chapter, I will discuss and draw a conclusion on all the findings on the early impact of the SSPA on parents and on schools.

Chapter 8 Discussion and conclusion

8.1. Introduction

This chapter draws together the evidence presented in chapters 5-7 and discusses the findings on the impact of the quasi-market reform of education in Hong Kong, that is, specifically, the early impact of the SSPA reform on parents and schools. The framework of this chapter follows the main research question and research sub-questions. Thus, the next three sections relate to the early impact on the consumers, parents; the three later sections relate to the early impact on the suppliers, schools. Firstly, section 8.2 provides a discussion of parents' school choice behaviour and the kind of choice Hong Kong parents have: vertical or horizontal, pluralistic or competitive. The research evidence mainly comes from chapter 5. Secondly, a discussion of whether there is inequality of opportunities in the new school choice policy will be in section 8.3. The research evidence mainly comes from chapter 5 too. Thirdly, a discussion of how Hong Kong parents perceive and respond to the quasi-market reform will be in section 8.4. The research evidence mainly comes from chapter 7. Fourthly, a discussion of how schools with different popularity respond to the changes of the SSPA, especially school strategies toward the changes of SSPA in 2001 will be in section 8.5. The evidence used mainly comes from chapter 6. Schools' responses include improving the school's image, increasing publicity activities and selection. Fifthly, a discussion of the impact of the SSPA

reform on size and social composition of school intakes will be in section 8.6. The evidence used mainly comes from chapter 6. Sixthly, a discussion of how educators perceive and comment on the quasi market reforms will be in 8.7. The evidence used mainly comes from chapter 7. A discussion of implications of the present study for our general understanding of parental choice and “quasi markets” will be presented in section 8.8. Finally, a conclusion about the early impact of school choice on parents and schools in Hong Kong will be drawn in section 8.9.

8.2. Parental choice situation-demand and competition

To begin with, my findings in chapter 5 confirmed that Hong Kong parents attached great importance to choosing the right school for their child because they thought it was very important to their child’s future opportunities, although some parents are more able than other parents to make effective school choices.

I also found that the competition for schools is primarily vertical rather than horizontal. As mentioned in chapter 3, vertical competition is based on choice from a hierarchy of schools defined by academic level or status, while horizontal competition is based on choice among schools with diverse characteristics or specialisms that are not hierarchically ordered. Hong Kong parents generally compete for the EMI, band I schools which are defined by academic level or status. The DSS school policy is said to be encouraging such diverse characteristics or specialisms of schools to develop. However the DSS school policy was not popular and widely implemented until 2003, nor is it yet evident that the DSS school policy can provide schools with more diverse characteristics or specialisms for parents to

choose from. In 2001, there was only one specialised aided school for parents to choose. It was the Jockey Club Ti-I College which specialised in sport and arts.

Furthermore, we found that the most important factors influencing the choices made by Hong Kong parents in 2001 were academic level or status. And these factors reflect distinctions that are primarily vertical rather than horizontal. Hong Kong parents regarded good school ethos and banding as more important than proximity in choosing school. And when parents chose DP schools, the higher the educational group of parents, the more likely they were to choose a school outside the local school net, although generally parents chose DP schools locally. The reason why more highly educated parents chose more distant schools may be due to their better off financial situation and capacity to pay transport costs, and their greater knowledge of distant schools. I will talk about this more in the next section.

The current research, as a matter of fact, confirms the great demand for EMI education in Hong Kong. Interview data shows that some parents could plan and prepare for getting EMI education for their child a few years before actually making the choice. The findings in this research show that parents' high regard for EMI education does not come from nowhere, but is indeed often related to their own job searching experience too. Hong Kong parents who wanted an EMI school often mentioned their own experience but not other people's experience. One thing in Hong Kong that needs to be noted here, as I have mentioned before in chapter 1 and 2, is that most EMI schools are band I schools. Many parents mentioned school ethos as a factor in school choice and this related to good education or positive environment and attitude toward learning. Thus it is still academic related.

Parents with a lower-achieving child, like parents in other countries, avoid schools with a bad reputation. Some parents really cared and hoped that their child would not be affected by the perceived bad influence of other children. However, some parents in Hong Kong simply regard getting the bad reputation school as losing face or being a loser. That is why Hong Kong parents generally have very strong negative feelings toward allocated schools with bad reputations. In both the survey and interview data, it is found that some parents were very frustrated and felt no way out.

This also explains why Hong Kong parents, no matter whether their child is able or a low achiever, often shift around trying to get a better school place after the choice result is announced. Some parents moved schools in pursuit of a better academic outcome while other parents just tried to avoid schools with bad reputations. These mobile groups of parents included parents from both the high education group and the low education group. Some very deprived parents who tried to move found out that even the application fee was unaffordable and thus were scared off. I will talk about this more in the next section.

Some Hong Kong parents prefer co-education for their child while others prefer single-sex education. However, the specific demand for single-sex education or co-education was an important factor for only a small number of parents in the survey. Academic or academic related factors, on the other hand, were more influential. It is also found that the importance of academic factors was similar for parents with children of each gender.

There were many appeal cases in 2001. The reasons included the inexperience of parents and teachers with the new SSPA and the different scaling systems for boys and girls. But this fact also revealed that many parents knew their right of appeal and exerted their right to appeal. Though some commented that appeals were useless while other parents were ignorant of their right to appeal or lacked the confidence to actually encash it. I will mention this more in the next section about inequality of opportunities.

8.3. Inequality of opportunities: winners and losers

The second research sub-question is: is there inequality of opportunity for parents to exercise choice in the new SSPA? The inequality of opportunities I refer to here is inequality inherent in the school choice mechanism or process, not the education outcome.

The findings confirmed that there are gender differences and social class differences in the 2001 SSPA cycle. In the SSPA in 2001, there are clearly gender inequalities. They first appeared in the choice process, where there were separate scaling systems for boys and girls. They then appeared in the results of choice and in the appeal cases and appeal successes. This is why the Equalities Opportunities Commission won the court case and thus the different scaling for boys and girls was then abolished in 2002. However, the comments of the policy maker and some Principals indicate that they still do not favour abolishing the treatment difference of genders. For the school administrators and policy makers, it is the imbalance of boys and girls in the co-education schools that caused discipline problems.

We also found social class inequalities in the choice process. These arose from the greater knowledge, cultural capital, and participation in the DP of the more highly educated parents. Selection of student from better background of over-subscribed schools is also one factor. Besides, we also found inequalities of opportunities after the result announced, with respect to finding another school place by parents themselves, the participation in the appeal mechanism and changing school if parents were very dissatisfied with their child's present school. I will present my findings as follows:

To begin with, generally most parents knew how to collect information from different sources, though some parents had more channels than others. Some parents were dissatisfied with the information given by their child's primary school and some others were satisfied. However, I did not have evidence of the link between different social groups of parents or gender of child in this aspect.

Although the DP in each school increased in 2001 from 10% to 20%, there is evidence that some parents with less educational attainment lacked the cultural capital to exercise their right to participate in the DP.

Furthermore, the selection strategy of some schools also contributed to the inequality of opportunities of school choice. For the educators, they acknowledged the inequality problems in different social groups, but, under the pressure of competition, they still select students with more cultural capital. The EMI1 school Principal claimed that the school wanted to serve students from the local community which is not so well off. However, the school's publicity activities, which extend toward other

farther away communities, suggest that the school still wanted to select students with more cultural capital in both the first round and second round DP, even from distant communities. Parents could apply for a discretionary place in a school outside the local school net. This suggests that the selection may extend with the increasing of DP to 30% in the reform SSPA agenda, if the policy makers continue this trend.

Regarding the ability or skill of parents, it is found that there is a link between parents' educational group and their success in DP application. There is not such a link with CA success. In 2001, as five bands were converted into three bands, a more random element was added into the mechanism of CA. This may have affected the outcome in CA too. On the other hand, as parents rank 30 choices in the Choice Form in CA, rather than choosing one specific school as in DP, the criterion of success may be less valid. Besides, within the CA process, we still found that the lower the educational group of parents, the more they found confusion and regarded the process as unfair.

Inequality of opportunities not only happened before or during the SSPA but after the SSPA. After the result was announced, evidence of inequalities of opportunities is found in the shifting-around period when parents tried to find another perceived better school place, in participation in the appeal mechanism and in changing schools if parents were very dissatisfied with their child's present school.

Though shifting around and applying for other school places were common after the results were announced, the fact that schools often asked for application fees could

scare off very deprived parents as they could not afford it. It is sad to learn that an application fee can be a barrier for very deprived parents.

Evidence of inequalities of opportunities found in participation of appeal and appeal success. For the knowledge of appeal, we found that generally, parents knew the right to appeal and how to exercise it. However, there were still some parents who did not have the confidence to encash their right and thus did not participate to appeal even though they might be eligible to get another school place. Readers may remember that for one parent who was illiterate and interviewed by us, participation in school choice depended on her very young child. It is comprehensible that the child lacked of the confidence to take part in the appeal mechanism.

Evidence of inequalities of opportunities also found in changes of school when parents were very dissatisfied with their child's present school in the later period. For parents who wanted to change school, besides the application fee, there are other fees for parents to consider such as transportation and uniform fees. These kinds of fees can deter poor parents who can not afford them.

Finally, besides the above, unequal opportunities in the school choice process are also revealed in the change of school intake social composition in Band I and Band III schools in the three years after the reform in 2001. The full impact of the reforms needs to be measured through a comparison with the social composition of intakes before the reforms in 2001, not only after them. This, the researcher has to admit, is one limitation of the current research.

8.4. Parents' knowledge and attitude toward the reform

The third research sub-question is: how do parents view the changes of the SSPA on the basis of their own experience? When the researcher revisits the findings in chapter 5 and chapter 7, the following are found:

First, not all parents have enough knowledge about the reform policies, especially the SSPA in 2001, let alone to take a head start in participating in the DP. We can see these when some parents mentioned that they are not clear about the policy.

Parents' attitudes and feelings toward the reforms are mainly influenced by or correspond to their success or failure of getting the school place for their child, the 'outcome effect'. That is, generally, if they succeed, they commented that the reform is good, if they failed, they were angry and disliked the SSPA reform. A similar situation occurred when parents succeeded in getting what they wanted. Parents often commented that the SSPA reform increased their chance of getting the school place. If they failed, parents often commented that the reform did not increase choice. They also commented negatively toward the reforms.

The findings in chapter 7 also reveal that parents are more concerned with whether their own child get a head start than with the principle of comprehensive education. That explains why parents with able children complained about mixed-ability teaching instead of appreciating its advantages. Parents with less able children were positive about the reform and regarded it as giving them more choice and a chance to get what they wished. But that does not mean they valued comprehensive education.

8.5. Schools' strategies in response to the new SSPA

The fourth research sub-question related to impact on schools: how do schools with different levels of popularity respond to the changes of SSPA? The following findings related to how the four case study school administrators reacts to the changes:

Firstly, there is evidence that schools increase their publicity activities in scope and in number in order to publicise the school to attract students and parents, even to distant communities.

Secondly, for administrative changes or response, there is evidence that schools also have special committees to organise all the publicity events. Often the Principal is the chairman of this committee.

Thirdly, over-subscribed school changed their selection criteria over a three-year period. In 2003, in order to attract students with all-round ability, besides the academic requirement, schools welcomed prospective students with other talents such as in sport or music. They also employed group interviews to select students with leadership ability or communicative skills.

Fourthly, we have evidence of more school selection. No matter whether it is in conflict with educators' educational principles or not, they still select. One Principal showed his concerns of whether there is a measurement of student achievement in the future. It is because if school do not have the information, it is difficult for schools to select able students academically.

Furthermore, beside academic criteria, school also selected students with better behaviour. School not only select more able children, but try to avoid children who may misbehave. This shows in the conduct bar of EMII. The criteria that stress school discipline are a deliberate signal to parents that the school has a better school ethos, which is regarded as an important factor for parents in choosing schools.

There is also evidence that over-subscribed schools often employed a second round DP to maximise the school intake, that is, to increase the class size from 40 to 43. So a Hong Kong school cannot open another branch like a supermarket but just maximise its class size. Whether or not this is good for the quality of education offered to students is another issue that is out of the scope of the current research.

8.6. *Early impact on schools' intake size and intake social composition*

The fifth research sub-question is how did the new SSPA impact on the intake size and social composition of schools with different levels of popularity?

I found evidence of an unpopular school decreasing its intake size dramatically. CMI2 had a great reduction in intake size and its survival was under threat. CMI1 maintained its intake size and this may be due to geographic and demographic difference. While CMI1 met a demand from the newly developed neighbourhood, CMI2 was in a hard-hit area of population decline, which I have mentioned in chapter 6. Another reason for the declining intake to CMI2 is the local transportation problem. CMI1, though a Band III school, seemed better off with the demand in the neighbouring newly developed area where new schools had not yet been built. Its

own survival may be under threat after the schools are built in a few years time in 2008, but before these schools are built, there is still a demand for secondary school places. So the two schools were actually facing quite different competition since they were situated in different school nets with different student populations.

Although the EMB acknowledged school CMI2's improvement, it seemed that the school did not have the positive reinforcement or support from EMB, that is the survival space CMI2 asked for, to pay off its hard work.

Secondly, I found evidence of change in the social composition of schools with different popularity. Chapter 6 reports the decreased number of very deprived students in EMI1 and the increase in deprived students in CMI1. For EMI2 and CMI2, they have different figures. The dramatic drop of intake size in CMI2, however, renders the comparison difficult.

Finally, the impact of the reform on schools was not only confined to the size and composition of their intakes. The resignation of the EMI2 and CMI2 School Principals surely can not be ignored. As two Principals resigned from their beloved schools, one considered popular and one very unpopular. It seems likely that these resignations were connected with the school choice reform, mediated by the pressure mentioned by the EMI2 Principal and by the survival threat mentioned by the CMI2 Principal.

8.7. *Educators' knowledge and attitude toward the reform*

The sixth research sub-question related to how administrators (Principals and Delegate) regarded the impact of changes in the SSPA on their schools? This is revealed in chapter 6 and chapter 7. The main aim of this section is to analysis educators' feelings and attitude toward the reforms. The four case-study schools, two EMI and two CMI, include popular and unpopular, star and sink, over-subscribed and under subscribed schools. These four schools can reveal how educators from different position in the education market view the reforms in Hong Kong, though each school may be unique in its history and characteristics.

First of all, educators have much more knowledge about the SSPA and the quasi-market reforms than parents. Through interviews with the four school administrators, the researcher learned that they knew the reform policies, the rationale behind them, though some administrators might not agree or be willing to implement them while some others seemed to embrace the reforms.

However, we can say educators are not very different from parents, although they have more knowledge, in that their concern is also very 'individualistic'. As stated in 8.4, parents' main concern is not about comprehensive education, but whether their own child gets the school place they favour. For educators, in a similar way, the main concern is their school's position in the education market place. That explained why educators tried to publicise their schools to attract and select the best students they could get. The EMI2 Principal, who felt the conflict and dilemma between selection and comprehensive education, seemed to be losing out in this reform. The banding or

the popularity of EMI2 dropped due to the media's attention to the behaviour problems of a few students in the school in 2002.

Even though selection conflicted with his educational principles, the EMI2 Principal could not stop or slow down the trend, but he had to follow it in full measure. In general, educators' main concern is the school's competitive position in the school market. So, although some educators may disagree with the principle of selecting students, schools may still employ all the selection criteria mentioned in chapter 6. It seemed that schools could not stop or slow down this trend of selecting the best students which are opposite to the notion of comprehensive education. As the EMI2 Principal commented: 'it is not right to select, we have to teach students, no matter who they are'. But he, under pressure from every side, could not stop the trend of selection.

With respect to educators' attitudes towards the reforms, the two EMI School Principals make rather negative judgements or comments on the reform, while the two CMI Band III schools seemed to welcome it. Were the two CMI school administrators really welcoming the reform? The CMI1 delegate, though considered very passive in the interview, like the CMI2 Principal, spent comparatively more time telling the researcher that the schools had tried to change and had improved a lot. He mentioned that the school's survival was under threat and they knew they had to change in order to survive. On the basis of this information, the schools seemed more likely to react to the reform in order to survive rather than to welcome the reforms. The CMI2 Principal, too, wanted to take the chance in the interview to

publicise the school, to tell the researcher the school had changed and made improvements.

By triangulating this evidence with the data in parent interviews the researcher concluded that the school really had made improvements. However, it was this Principal who told the researcher that parents were blind in choosing schools and the SSPA reform did not give parents real choice but a 'false' choice.

Finally but importantly, another aspect of the research is that educators were too busy engaging in implementing all the policies. This may lead them to lack a holistic view on evaluating the impact of the quasi-market reform on education in Hong Kong.

8.8. Implications

This section discusses the implications of the present study for our general understanding of parental choice and quasi-market. It makes sense to begin by comparing the Hong Kong case with the ideal type of a quasi-market mentioned in the literature review in chapter 3.

To a certain extent, the Hong Kong reform can be considered a case study of parental choice rather than of a quasi-market. The situation in Hong Kong differs from the ideal type of a quasi-market in a few ways:

Firstly, within both the Computer Allocation System (CA) and Discretionary Places Allocation System (DP), the fact that parental choice in Hong Kong coexists with a

system of academic selection makes it different from the quasi-market in many countries. However, it is not unique as open enrolment has been introduced in other selective systems, such as that of Northern Ireland.

Secondly, the Hong Kong reform, on one hand, moves from a streamed system with 5 bands into a slightly more comprehensive one with 3 bands. The goal of the reform is said to be to improve education and to provide the kind of human resources that the knowledge economy needs. However, on the other hand, the reform also includes privatisation and quasi-market policies emphasising increased choice. This blurring of the public and private sectors is also found in other quasi-markets in other countries, although in some other quasi-markets vouchers are used to purchase education in the private sector while there are no vouchers in the Hong Kong system yet.

Thirdly, the computer allocation system in Hong Kong is very centralised. Open enrolment is limited to DSS schools (which can have 100% Discretionary Places) but not aided school. For aided schools, although the percentage of Discretionary Places increased from 10% to 20% in 2001 or 30% in the future policy agenda, it is still limited and not comparable to the 100% open enrolment found in many other quasi-markets. These two very different allocation mechanisms - the centralised computer allocation and discretionary allocation - coexist, making the Hong Kong model distinctive.

Fourthly, the enrolment related funding formula (per capita funding) in other quasi-market did not apply completely to the Hong Kong case. In Hong Kong, two funding

principles co-existed, a fixed amount of funding was provided to each aided school and funding based on student numbers (enrolment-related) was provided to each DSS school on top of its tuition fee. Within aided schools in Hong Kong, funding, to a certain extent, remained unchanged. This is why in our findings in chapter 6, although CMI2's intake size dropped in 2001-2, its funding did not decrease and the school could employ small class sizes (with a teaching staff of 57) and cater for individual needs of the students. Both the unpopular CMI schools (CMI1 and CMI2) seemed very positive to change. If school funding did decrease according to the school's intake decrease, their experience and their response to the reform may not have been the same. Also, as funding related to material and human resources, funding differences may create impact on the quality of education in different types of school (DSS schools with tuition fee on top of government funding may have more funding over aided schools).

Lastly, the Hong Kong allocation process involved a complicated procedure and arrangement that required matching of students with schools academically (See Chapter 2 and Appendix A). The fact that Hong Kong parents needed to know the band of their child and how to match their child to a school was very different from quasi-markets in other countries.

In short, the differences, when compared with other quasi market, to a certain extent, can be attributed to features of the HK context: allocation mainly based on banding/streaming of students; a complicated procedure and arrangement of the Hong Kong school choice; the coexistence of two different funding mechanisms. Thus, the concept of a quasi-market in education, applied to Hong Kong, needs to be

qualified by reference to other principles of selection/allocation with which it is combined.

For the evaluation on the impact of the policy, Hong Kong case is not yet 100% open enrolment but is increasing--discretionary places is expected to increase from 20% to 30% or even 100% in the future . A comparison of the sizes and social compositions of school intakes at different stages of the school choice reform, as the proportion of discretionary places rose from 20% to 30% and continued to rise above that, would be interesting and may offer policy makers some insight on the impact of the school choice reform.

For the impact of parental choice on school and parents, our empirical findings support the findings of other studies. With respect to the supply side, we clearly see the increase of publicity activities and school image-building activities among our four case study schools. Whether the school was popular or not, the pressure to attract students and maintain its intake size affected all four schools.

In the past, secondary education allocation in Hong Kong was highly centralised. But with the present reform policies, increasing the percentage of discretionary places (DP) in aided schools and 100% DP in some popular DSS school, the allocation system became less centralised.

Another issue of school choice concerns parents who choose without what Lawton (1992:85-86) termed as 'perfect information'. Our study of the Hong Kong case also shows that not all parents have the perfect information to encash their right of choice for their children.

Besides imperfect information, there are other issues related to confidence of parents in DP application; participation in the appeal and participation in the 'second round' Discretionary Places employed by schools (adding each class size from 40 to 43) after the allocation result was announced in August. Furthermore, the application fee that parents have to pay in order to apply and change school are common in Hong Kong but not in other countries. However, the experience of some Hong Kong parents that it was difficult to change school, confirms Bartlett's (1993:143) observation that 'It is relatively difficult and costly for pupils to switch schools if the quality of educational provision does not meet up to expectations'

As some groups of parents with more social and cultural capital may have an advantage over those who have not, the Hong Kong case confirms Jonathan's (1997: 51) observation that 'people do not differ merely in their preferences and their resources for obtaining them. They also differ in abilities, understanding, experience and cultural capital, all of which structure preferences, making some possible and others not'. Bowe et al (1992:53) similarly argued that 'choice' is not neutral or classless: choices in fact, have 'class bias'. Social and cultural capital played an important role in choice making.

With the language policy, which limited the number of EMI secondary schools after 1997, the demand for EMI education complicated the market even further in the Hong Kong case. As mentioned in chapter 5, competition among schools is mainly vertical rather than horizontal, and the competition for EMI school places is likely become more severe. Lawton distinguishes between offering real choice (where there is a high chance of meeting those choices) and 'lottery' choice (where parents

might be encouraged to choose, but where there will be a very low chance of satisfaction). The idea of parents being able to choose schools was 'splendid in principle' as Lawton (1992:105-108) stated, but the Hong Kong case also shows that there were bitter complaints about the failure of the system to deliver choice.

In the Hong Kong case, with respect to the popular schools, it was more a matter of schools selecting students, not parents choosing schools. The selection criteria of our two popular EMI schools, are consistent with Bowe et al's (1992:53) observation that schools, especially the popular ones, compete to attract greater cultural capital in the hope of yielding higher returns. This kind of selection is likely to cause social segregation among schools with different popularity in the Hong Kong education market.

Bartlett & Le Grand (1993:32) noted: 'If "cream-skimming" occurs: purchasers can choose for whom they will purchase, and providers can choose for whom they will provide, that is, if they can skim off the cream, then welfare services may not reach those who need them most and equity will not be achieved'. So, they (Bartlett & Le Grand 1993:34) argued that there should not be an incentive for providers or purchasers to discriminate between users in favour of those who are least expensive. However, EMI1 created a conduct bar as a priority selection criterion, thus discriminating between users in favour of those who are least expensive.

Feintuck (1994: 64) stated that choice did not really empower parents, but just encourage selection by oversubscribed schools. The consequence of marketisation in

education might result in exclusion, segregation and the polarisation of school intakes.

In short, there are a few differences in the findings of our study when compared with other studies - for example, we find that Principals of unpopular school are positive toward the reform, and that unpopular schools have more resources to cater for individual needs of students - but these can be attributed to features of the Hong Kong context. For the larger part, despite the very different market model, features and parental choice context of Hong Kong from other countries, the impact of school choice on parents and schools has many similarities with other quasi-markets. The researcher agrees with Brown and Lauder (1997:187, 190) that 'when education becomes a positional good and where the stakes are forever increasing in terms of income, life-chances, and social status, powerful individuals and groups will seek to maximise their resources to ensure that they have a stake in the game by whatever means...Therefore, how the state intervenes to regulate this competition in a way which reduces the inequalities of those trapped in lower socio-economic groups must be addressed...'.

8.9. Conclusion

This research has come to the conclusion, and agrees with Tse (1998:101) on this that 'despite the implementation of universal education for nearly twenty years, an increase in educational opportunities did not result in an equal sharing of the opportunities or a reduction of inequality. In fact, differences and inequalities along different levels of school still persist in the current Hong Kong educational system,

which are closely related to the factors like class, family background, gender and the like'. However, it also has analysed the early impact of the SSPA on both the consumer and the supplier, on their response and attitude toward the SSPA. Though the policy detail and market context is unique in Hong Kong, there are still many similarities with other quasi-market situations in other parts of the world. Evidence such as: over-subscribed schools selecting students from better backgrounds, changes in schools' intake sizes, early signs of changing school social compositions and increasing school publicity activities.

The current research has its limitations, associated with such factors as access, opportunistic sampling, the lack of a longitudinal approach permitting comparisons before and after the reform, and the time factor in the SSPA reform agenda. Moreover, the quasi market in Hong Kong is still in an early stage and not yet fully developed. Nevertheless the present study, with qualitative and quantitative evidence is believed to serve as one piece of historical evidence, on a unique case like Hong Kong, to add to the research literature on school choice. Future research can build on this study for comparisons of the further development of the quasi-market and its impact in Hong Kong at a later date.

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Appendix A Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA)

(found in the government policy website in 1999-2001)

Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System

An Outline of the Secondary School Places Allocation System (for the 1999/2001 Cycle)

The Government has adopted the Education Commission's reform proposals on education system in its Report published in September 2000. These include the transitional measures to reform the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System. Accordingly, changes have been made to the System as from the 2000/01 school year. The main features of the revised SSPA System are now described below:

1. Internal Assessments

A Primary 6 student's chance of allocation to a school of his/her preference depends largely on his/her position in the order of merit of his/her own school. This order of merit is based on the school's internal assessments at the end of Primary 5, and both in mid-year and at the end of Primary 6 and is formed by standardising all the students' marks for all subjects. To ensure that students will receive a balanced education, all subjects taught in the school are assessed, except Physical Education in all schools and Religious Knowledge and Putonghua in some schools.

2. The Scaling Mechanism

As different schools may have different curricula and the standard of marking or assessment may vary from school to school, it is not appropriate to put the marks of all schools side by side directly to form an order of merit for the purpose of allocation. Hence, a scaling mechanism will be used to scale and convert schools' internal assessments, such that the converted marks of all participating schools may be put into an order of merit fairly. Before the 2000/2001 school year, the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT) performed the role as a scaling instrument.

As recommended by the Education Commission, the Education Department has abolished the AAT with effect from the 2000/2001 school year. During the transitional period (i.e. from the 2000/01 school year to the 2004/05 school year), the average of each primary school's AAT results in the past three years (i.e. 1997/98, 1998/99 and 1999/2000) will be used to scale students' school internal assessment results for the purpose of determining their allocation bands.

According to research findings, there are significant discrepancies in the performance of boy students and girl students in school internal assessments and in the AAT. In the scaling process, it is more fairer to treat boy and girl students separately. Therefore, the internal assessments of boy and girl students are scaled independently.

3. School Nets

In line with District Administration boundaries, the whole territory is divided into 18 school nets. Each school net comprises all the participating primary and secondary schools physically located in the area and a number of different types of secondary schools of other areas providing school places for the net.

4. Allocation Bands and Random Number

As there are significant developmental and performance differences between boys and girls, to make due allowance for these differences and to provide equal opportunities for boys and girls in the school places allocation process, boy students and girl students are ranked separately into allocation bands in allocating school places.

The scaled internal assessments of all boy/girl students in a school net are put into a separate order of merit for determination of their allocation bands. Commencing from the 2000/2001 school year, the allocation bands will be revised from five to three for boys and girls separately, each consisting of 1/3 of the total Primary 6 boy/girl students in the school net. The order of allocation within the same allocation band (disregarding boy or girl students) is determined by the computer-generated random number allotted to each student. This random number is generated by the computer before the running of the allocation programme and has no connection with the Student Reference Number.

5. Parents' Choices of Schools

Every year in early May, the Education Department distributes to each Primary 6 student a Secondary School List showing the secondary schools which provide school places for the school net he/she belongs to. Parents then make their choices from the list and place them in an order of preference. School places allocation procedure is done according to the order of preference indicated.

6. Allocation by Net, by Band and by Parental Choice

Allocation is done on a net basis. When students in a school net are allotted a random number, the process of allocation commences. Students in Allocation Band 1 are first allocated Secondary 1 places according to their parents' choices, then students in Allocation Band 2 and 3 consecutively.

If a particular secondary school has more applicants than places, applicants of the same band with smaller random numbers will be allocated a place first. Within an allocation band, first choices will be allocated first, then second choices and so on.

This process will go on until all the students in the school net have been allocated a place.

7. Example of Allocation

In order to keep a good balance of boy/girl ratio of each co-educational secondary school for encouraging co-education, the places of each co-educational secondary school are divided into places for boys and places for girls before the allocation process commences. The number of places available to boys and girls in each co-educational school reflects the sex ratio of the applicants of the respective school nets (after deducting the places in single sex schools) so as to ensure that boys and girls in a particular school net have equal opportunities to study in each co-educational school in that net.

In allocating school places, boy students and girl students are dealt with separately in the Secondary School Places Allocation System. The following example illustrates the actual allocation procedure for a boy student :

Boy Student

Name : CHAN Tai-wai
Allocation
Band : 1
School Net : X
School Choices : First - School A
: Second - School B

In School Net X

No. of Allocation Band 1 boy
students : 1000
No. of Allocation Band 1 boy
students choosing School A as first
choice : 150
No. of boys' places available in
School A : 100

As only 100 boys' places are available in School A in School Net X but there are 150 Allocation Band 1 boy students in the school net choosing that school as their first choice, the computer will choose 100 of them to fill these places in School A according to their random numbers. Suppose CHAN Tai-wai's random number is within the first 100, CHAN will be allocated to School A. Otherwise, he will not be allocated a school place according to his first choice. If CHAN is not allocated a place according to his first choice, the computer, after screening the first choices of all the boy students in the same allocation band, will read the second choices of all boy students (including CHAN) in the same allocation band who have not been allocated a place in their first school choices. Suppose there are 650 boy students still unallocated after the computer has processed the first choices of all the Allocation

Band 1 boy students, and among them, 8 (including CHAN) have chosen School B as their second choice. Say School B has 10 places left after the first school choice allocation. Since School B has enough places left to accommodate the 8 boy students, CHAN will be allocated to the school.

On occasion that more than 10 (including CHAN) out of the above mentioned 650 boy students have chosen School B as their second choice, the computer will then select 10 boy students according to the boys' random numbers to fill the 10 available boys' places in School B. If CHAN is still not chosen, the computer will read his third choice, fourth choice and so on in the same manner until he is allocated a school place.

Hence, though both CHAN and his classmate Lee Kwok-keung are in Allocation Band 1 and have made identical school choices, CHAN may be allocated to the school of his third or fourth choice while LEE may be allocated to the school of his first choice. This is so because the order of allocation of the boy students in the same allocation band is determined by the random numbers allotted to them. This may happen even if CHAN were in a higher position than LEE in the order of merit based on their internal assessments. This is in line with the policy of mixed ability intake for schools.

The above allocation procedure also applies to girl students.

8. Feeder and Nominated School Schemes

Under the Feeder School Scheme, a parent secondary school may reserve, after the deduction of repeater and discretionary places, a maximum of up to 85% of the remaining places for its feeder primary school.

Under the Nominated School Scheme, a parent secondary school may reserve, after the deduction of repeater and discretionary places, only a maximum of up to 25% of the remaining places for its nominated primary school.

A student studying in a feeder/nominated school is eligible for a feeder/nominated place in his/her parent secondary school only if he/she is in Allocation Band 1 or 2 and has chosen the parent school as his/her first choice. If there are more eligible Primary 6 students in the feeder/nominated primary school than the feeder/nominated places available in its parent secondary school, allocation of such students in Allocation Band 2 will begin only after all their classmates in Allocation Band 1 have been allocated. If there are more Allocation Band 2 feeder/nominated students than feeder/nominated places then available, allocation will be based on the students' random numbers.

9. Discretionary Places

In general, secondary schools participating in the System are allowed to reserve not more than 20% of their Secondary 1 places as discretionary places for admission of students before the central allocation.

Parents can apply to ONLY ONE secondary school for the discretionary places they wish their children to take up. It should be stressed that application to more than one school for discretionary places will automatically result in the forfeiture of all rights to a discretionary place.

It is up to schools to decide whether a student is accepted in accordance with its admission criteria. Schools may arrange interviews but no written test should be conducted. A student accepted by a school to fill a discretionary place will not be allocated another place in the central allocation. If not accepted, the student is still eligible for the central allocation and will be allocated a Secondary 1 place in the public sector.

10. Enquiries

Parents seeking further information may contact the School Places Allocation Section of the Education Department.

Address : 5th Floor, Lui Kee Education Services
Centre,
269 Queen's Road East,
Wan Chai, Hong Kong.

Telephone No. : 2832 7740 or 2832 7700

Appendix B1 Letter of Invitation to all the secondary schools in Hong Kong to participate in the parental choice project (both survey and case study) and their consent forms



FACULTY of EDUCATION
University of Edinburgh
Holyrood Road
Edinburgh
EH8 8AQ

Email: m.s.chan@sms.ed.ac.uk
Tel: 44-131- 668 3389

Dear Principal,

Request for Participation in Education Policy Research

Education policy in Hong Kong has undergone dramatic changes in recent years. These changes have become major concerns for parents and for people involved in the education sectors. Of these changes the Parental Choice Policy adopted in 2001 is of unprecedented importance affecting the schools, the pupils, and the parents to this day. A study of this policy will be of great importance for an understanding and review of education policy of Hong Kong in the past and its prospect in the future.

My name is Mei Siu Chan (Ruth), and I come from Hong Kong. I had been a teacher for eight years in Hong Kong. In December 2000, I completed a MSc degree in Education in the University of Edinburgh. Currently, I am working on a PhD degree in the same University. For my PhD thesis, I am conducting a study of the parental choice policy adopted in 2001 in Hong Kong. My focus will be on the parental choice process for Hong Kong secondary schools. Special attention will be given to the schools' and parents' views on the new policy. I believe that this research will provide a major academic review of this policy and will be of great value to educators and policy makers who want to improve on the education policy in Hong Kong.

Therefore I would like to request your consent for your school's participation in this project. In my planning minimal administrative procedures on the part of the school are required. I only require Form One students from your school. The project includes issuing **questionnaires** (in Chinese) for the parents of the Form One students. The school's co-operation involves delivering the questionnaires to and

collecting them from the parents. This can be done by issuing the questionnaires to the students, who then take them to their parents. The students will collect the questionnaires from their parents and return them to the class teacher. Executed in this way, administrative complexities will be simplified. Then I will collect the questionnaires from your school **in person** in Hong Kong. Once I have analysed the questionnaires, in the second stage of the project I plan to select a few schools in which I will conduct interviews with the Principal and a few parents. If your school is selected for the interview, each interview will take about thirty minutes so that interruptions will be minimised. My hope is that this project will achieve a better understanding of the new school choice policy in Hong Kong and contribute to the future policy making in this system. Your kind co-operation will help realise these aims.

This research is subject to the researchers' codes of practice which guarantee the confidentiality of information on individuals and on schools. Thus, while I will appreciate your co-operation and participation in this research, **all data and information relating to the identity of the school, the staffs, the students, and their parents, will be kept private and confidential: No school, parent or student will be named or identifiable in my report.**

I would be very grateful if you kindly give your consent for your school to participate in this project soon.

If you have any questions about the study, I would be happy to answer them. I can be reached by phone, by e-mail or by post: Contact address of me (I am in H.K. from 3rd of April to 2nd of July)

Enclosed is a **confirmation letter** from my supervisors in the University of Edinburgh.

Yours sincerely,

Mei-siu Chan (Ruth)
PhD Candidate, University of Edinburgh

(Please complete the tear-off slip below and return your reply with the provided envelope)

Parental Choice Research Project Return Slip

I give consent to my school _____
(name of the secondary school)

to participate in the Parental Choice Research Project: Stage I (survey) _____ only, or
both Stage I (survey) and Stage II (interview) _____

Signature _____ **Date** _____

Appendix B2 Letter of Invitation to parents, the parental questionnaires and interview consent forms (Chinese version)



FACULTY of EDUCATION
University of Edinburgh
Holyrood Road
Edinburgh
EH8 8AQ

電郵: m.s.chan@sms.ed.ac.uk

電話: 0131 6683389

致各家長或監護人,

誠邀你參加『升中選校研究計劃』

本人陳美笑(Ruth)，畢業於羅富國教育學院，曾在香港任教八年。並於 2000 年在愛丁堡大學完成教育碩士課程。現於同一大學攻讀博士課程。

本人的博士論文題目為『香港升中選校』，反映出本人對香港近年來教育制度改變的關注。

這研究已得到 貴校長之同意，讓閣下可自行決定是否參與這項問卷研究。本人十分感謝各位之參與。

各家長及監護人所填寫的資料將會絕對保密。所填寫的資料，校方不會收到通知。為確保填寫資料及填寫人身份的保密，請將填寫好之問卷放入指定的信封，把封口貼好後交回學校。

假若閣下對這研究有任何問題，本人十分樂意回答。請致電或電郵給我（H.K.: 93251147, U.K. +44-131-6683389，電 郵 地 址：m.s.chan@sms.ed.ac.uk, m.s.chan@btopenworld.com)

多謝你抽空填寫這份問卷。

謹此致謝

陳美笑 (Ruth)
愛丁堡大學博士生

愛丁堡大學
家長選校研究
家長問卷

所填寫的資料將會絕對保密。學校不會收到通知。

介紹：

此問卷的目的是調查最新的香港升中選校政策，調查對象為在 2000 年曾為子女選校的家長（父母其中一人）或監護人。此研究十分重要，因此希望各位盡量完成整份問卷。此問卷分為兩部份。甲部是有關選校政策。乙部則是關於各位的家庭及子女。所有填寫資料將會保密，請將填寫好之問卷放入指定的信封，把封口貼好後交回學校。遇有未能作答之問題，請留空，繼續完成其他問題即可。問題主要針對閣下為剛剛升上中學的子女所作的選校決定。請盡量填寫問卷及提供意見。

學校名稱及學生姓名不會在報告中出現，純粹為紀錄及統計分類之用。

子女就讀中學名稱：_____

學生姓名：_____

甲部包括四個環節。第一節是有關『學校自行收生機制』的問題。第二節是有關『中一電腦派位機制』的問題。第三節是有關上訴機制的問題。第四節是對子女就讀中學的滿意程度問題。

第一節 學校自行收生機制

以下問題是有關『學校自行收生機制』及透過這機制你所選擇的學校

一。 你去年是否有透過『學校自行收生機制』替你子女申請中學？

（請在其中一個選擇旁加上『√』號）

有☐（繼續下一題） 無☐（跳到第二節）

二。 請填寫你選擇申請的中學名稱

三。 a. 此學校是否隸屬於你居住地區的學校網？

隸屬於☐ 不隸屬於☐

三。 b. 此學校屬於哪一個組別(Band)?（請在選擇旁加上『√』號）

第一組別(Band 1)☐ 第二組別(Band 2)☐ 第三組別(Band 3)☐
不清楚☐

三。 c. 你的子女是否成功升讀此中學？

成功☐ 不成功☐

四。 你期望子女能升讀此中學的原因是甚麼？

五。選擇學校時的重要因素有很多，其中一些因素列舉如下。請從這列表中選擇其中五項你認為是透過『學校自行收生機制』替你子女申請中學最重要的因素，並給予先後次序（最重要的請填1）

	因 素	請選擇最重要的五項因素	給予先後次序 1至5（最重要的請填1）
一	學校離家比較接近		
二	交通方便		
三	子女小學老師的意見		
四	朋友們的意見		
五	親人的意見		
六	校舍環境優美		
七	學校宗教背景		
八	學校地區高尚		
九	學校是男女校		
十	學校是純男校或純女校		
十一	校風優良		
十二	學校有良好傳統		
十三	學校組別(Band)		
十四	學校教育優良		
十五	學校有好校長及好老師		
十六	某些科目有名（如體育、音樂等）		
十七	科目選擇多		
十八	英語教學(英文中學)		
十九	課餘活動選擇多		
二十	設備優良		
二十一	校外試成績優異		
二十二	對子女未來找工作有幫助		
二十三	升讀大學機會高		
二十四	有兄弟姐妹在同一學校就讀		
二十五	有朋友在同一學校就讀		
二十六	有親戚在同一學校就讀		
二十七	學校很多人報讀		
二十八	其他因素（請列明）		

六。你對結果是否滿意？（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

滿意□ 不滿意□

七 a。你是否清楚學校甄選學生時的準則？（請在選擇旁加上『√』號）

清楚□ 不清楚□

七 b。若是清楚的話，原因是甚麼？

七 c。若是清楚的話，你是從何得知這些準則的？

八。 你認為學校甄選學生時的準則是否公平？

（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋）

公平□ 不公平□

九。 當你還未申請這學校前，你曾否有透過以下途徑得到學校的資料？

		請加『√』號
一	學校派發的資料	
二	親身到學校視察環境	
三	跟子女的小學校長或老師交談	
四	跟報讀學校的校長或老師交談	
五	跟教育署聯絡	
六	跟家人或親戚交談	
七	跟其他兒童交談	
八	跟朋友或鄰居交談	
九	從電視或收音機得知	
十	從報章得知	
十一	從學校的互聯網頁得知	
十二	沒有所報讀學校的資料	
十三	其他途徑（請列明）	

十。 以上哪一項資料來源對你的決定影響最大？

十一。經歷過『學校自行收生機制』所得到的知識和經驗，你的選擇會否依然跟你以往所選擇的相同？（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋）

相同☐ 不相同☐

十二。你是否贊成學校自行收生的比例由 2001 年前的 10%增加至 2001 年的 20%，和 2006 年開始的 30%？

（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

贊成☐ 不贊成☐

十三。身為家長/監護人的你是否認為由 2006 年開始，可以選擇多過一間學校對你是個好主意？（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

好主意□ 不認為是好主意□

十四。你的子女對是次選校決定的參與有多少？

很多_____完全沒有
1 2 3 4 5
（請在適當的數目字打一個圈）

你對這一節還有沒有其他意見？

第二節 中一電腦派位機制

以下問題是有關『中一電腦派位機制』及你在學校網選擇學校時的次序

一。概括而言，當填寫意願表選校的優先次序時，你認為哪些因素影響最大？

二。以優先次序選擇學校時的重要因素有很多，其中一些因素列舉如下。請從這列表中選擇其中五項你認為是透過『中一派位機制』以優先次序選擇學校時最重要的因素，並給予先後次序。（最重要的請填1）

	因 素	請 選 擇 最 重 要 的 五 項 因 素	給 予 先 後 次 序 1 至 5（最重 要 的 請 填 1）
一	學校離家比較接近		
二	交通方便		
三	子女小學老師的意見		
四	朋友們的意見		
五	親人的意見		
六	校舍環境優美		
七	學校宗教背景		
八	學校地區高尚		
九	學校是男女校		
十	學校是純男校或純女校		
十一	校風優良		
十二	學校有良好傳統		
十三	學校組別(Band)		
十四	學校教育優良		
十五	學校有好校長及好老師		
十六	某些科目有名（如體育、音樂等）		
十七	科目選擇多		
十八	英語教學(英文中學)		
十九	課餘活動選擇多		
二十	設備優良		
二十一	校外試成績優異		
二十二	對子女未來找工作有幫助		
二十三	升讀大學機會高		
二十四	有兄弟姊妹在同一學校就讀		
二十五	有朋友在同一學校就讀		
二十六	有親戚在同一學校就讀		
二十七	學校很多人報讀		
二十八	其他因素（請列明）		

三。當你還未選擇學校的優先次序前，你曾否有透過以下途徑得到學校的資料？

		請加『√』號
一	學校派發的資料	
二	親身到學校視察環境	
三	跟子女的小學校長或老師交談	
四	跟報讀學校的校長或老師交談	
五	跟教育署聯絡	
六	跟家人或親戚交談	
七	跟其他兒童交談	
八	跟朋友或鄰居交談	
九	從電視或收音機得知	
十	從報章得知	
十一	從學校的互聯網頁得知	
十二	沒有所報讀學校的資料	
十三	其他途徑（請列明）	

四。 以上哪一項資料來源對你選擇學校的優先次序影響最大？

五。 對於子女小學提供給你選擇學校的優先次序的意見，你是否覺得滿意？
（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

滿意 ☐ 不滿意 ☐

六。你的子女對是次選擇學校的優先次序的參與有多少？

很多 _____ 完全沒有
1 2 3 4 5
（請在適當的數目字打一個圈）

七。a. 你的子女現正就讀的中學是意願表上的第幾選擇？

		請加『√』號
一	第一選擇	
二	第二選擇	
三	第三選擇	
四	第四選擇	
五	第五選擇	
六	其他（請注明）	
七	我並無選擇這學校	

七。b. 你的子女現正就讀的中學是屬於哪一個組別(Band)?

（請在選擇旁加上『√』號）

第一組別(Band 1) ☐

第二組別(Band 2) ☐

第三組別(Band 3) ☐

不清楚 ☐

八。經歷過『中一電腦派位機制』所得到的知識和經驗，若然再來選擇一次，你是否會選擇不同的優先次序？

（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

會選擇不同的優先次序 ☐

不會選擇不同的優先次序 ☐

九。身為家長/監護人的你是否認為由 2000 年開始取消學能測驗是個好主意？

（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

好主意 ☐

不認為是好主意 ☐

十。身為家長/監護人的你是否認為以派位組別來分辨學生是公平的？
（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

公平□ 不公平□

十一。身為家長/監護人的你是否認為派位組別由五個組別減至三個組別是個好發展？（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

是個好發展□ 不是個好發展□

十二。若你以前曾為其他子女選擇過學校的話，你是否覺得新的機制比較好？
（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

新機制比較好□ 舊機制比較好□

你對這一節還有沒有其他意見？

你是否覺得你子女所獲派得之學校可以接受？（請加『√』號）

_____ 可以接受（請跳到第四節）

_____ 不可以接受，經上訴之後被派到另一學校。

（請繼續到第三節）

_____ 不可以接受，經上訴之後未有被派另一學校。

（請繼續到第三節）

_____ 不可以接受，但未有上訴
（請跳到第四節）

第三節 上訴機制

以下問題是有關去年七月派位結果公佈之後的『上訴機制』

一。 你為何要上訴？

二。 你從何得知你有上訴權？

三。 上訴的結果如何？（請在選擇旁加上『√』號）

勝訴☐ 敗訴☐

四 a。 你對上訴的結果滿意嗎？（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

滿意☐ 不滿意☐

四 b。 你的上訴是敗訴的話，你下一步如何處理？（請在選擇旁加上『√』號）

接受敗訴☐ 找其他學校☐

五。 請分享你對上訴機制的意見？

你對這一節還有沒有其他意見？

第四節 子女就讀中學的滿意程度

以下問題是有關你子女現正就讀的學校

一。你子女現正就讀的學校是：

	請加『√』號
透過『學校自行收生機制』成功申請到的。	
透過『中一電腦派位機制』獲派的。	
經過上訴後獲派的。	
獲派位後不滿意而自行選擇的。	
不清楚來源的。	
其他（請注明）	

二。你對於你子女現正就讀的學校的滿意程度有多少？（請解釋）

非常滿意 _____ 非常不滿意
1 2 3 4 5
（請在適當的數目字打一個圈）

原因是？

三。你的子女短期內會否轉學校？（請在選擇旁加上『√』號，並作出解釋。）

會轉學校 ☐ 不會轉學校 ☐

你對這一節還有沒有其他意見？

乙部 子女及家庭狀況

為方便統計分類，請你填寫以下關於你的子女及家庭狀況的問題。所有內容絕對保密。

一。 你的子女是 男生 ☐ 女生 ☐

二。 請填寫你子女 2000 年就讀小學的資料：

小學名稱	
是否屬於居住地區校網？	
是私校還是津校？	

三。根據小學所提供的資料，你的子女是屬於教育署所定的哪一個派位組別 (Band)?

	請加『√』號
第一組別(Band 1)	
第二組別(Band 2)	
第三組別(Band 3)	
不清楚	

四。請填寫你其他的子女資料。

☐ 無其他子女

☐ 其他子女性別/年 齡:

	性 別	年 齡
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

五。家庭居住地點：就讀校網是否與居住地區相同？

（請在選擇旁加上『√』號）

是□

否□

六。你是學生的家長還是監護人？（請在選擇旁加上『√』號）

你是學生的		請加『√』號
一	母親	
二	父親	
三	男性監護人	
四	女性監護人	
五	其他（請注明）	

七。請提供你離開學校時的年齡及你的學業程度。

離開學校時的年齡	
學業程度	

八。請提供你的配偶離開學校時的年齡及學業程度。

離開學校時的年齡	
學業程度	

九。請提供你的專業資格。

專 業 資 格	
------------	--

十。請提供你的配偶的專業資格。

專 業 資 格	
------------	--

你對這一部份還有沒有其他意見？

感謝你抽空參與填寫此問卷

假如你願意更深入地探討選校問題並願意接受訪問（或電話訪問）
的話，請提供你的聯絡資料：

姓名_____電話號碼_____

地_____址_____

傳真號碼_____

電郵地址_____

（ 為 確 保 填 寫 資 料 及 填 寫 人
身份的保密，請將填寫好之問卷放入指定的信封，把封口貼好後交回學校。）

Appendix B3 Letter of Invitation to parents, the parental questionnaires and interview consent forms (English version)



FACULTY of EDUCATION
University of Edinburgh
Holyrood Road
Edinburgh
EH8 8AQ

Email: m.s.chan@sms.ed.ac.uk
Telephone: 0131 6683389

Dear parents or guardian,

Invitation to participate in the secondary school choice research project

My name is Mei Siu Chan (Ruth), and I come from Hong Kong. I had been a teacher for eight years in Hong Kong. In December 2000, I completed a MSc degree in Education in the University of Edinburgh. Now I am working on a PhD degree in the same University. The topic I have chosen for my PhD thesis is "Secondary School Choice in Hong Kong" which, I feel, reflects my concern for the Education Reforms undertaking in Hong Kong.

I have gained consent from the school principal in conducting this research and I am writing to ask if you would be willing to spare some time to participate in this study. I would be very grateful if you would participate, however, your decision to participate in this study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, Please fill in the 'Parental Choice Questionnaire' below.

All the information you give will be kept private and confidential. The school will not be informed about your reply. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity,

please seal the questionnaire in the provided envelope before you return it to the school

If you have any questions about the study, I would be happy to answer them. You can reach me by phone or my e-mail. (Edinburgh phone-0131-6683389, Hong Kong phone 93251147, e-mail address: m.s.Chan@sms.ed.ac.uk).

Thank you very much for taking time to fill in the questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

Mei-siu Chan (Ruth)

PhD Student, University of Edinburgh

University of Edinburgh

Parental Choice Project

Parent Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions as appropriately as you can.

All answers will be kept private and confidential. The school will not be informed about your reply.

Introduction:

The questionnaire is about the new secondary school choice policy in Hong Kong and is expected to be filled in by one of the parents (father or mother) or the guardian who chose the school for his/her child in 2001. This research is very important and therefore I hope you will be willing to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire has two main parts. Part I is about the choice policy. Part II is about your child and your family. All of the answers you give to these questions will be kept confidential: please seal the questionnaire with the envelope provided before you hand it in to the school. If you cannot answer a question, please feel free to leave it out and continue with the remainder. The questions relate to your choice of secondary school for your child who has entered secondary school last September. Please answer (tick or write in the answer) as many questions as possible and feel free to add any comments.

Name of the school and name of the student will not be mentioned in my report but it is for my own record keeping to know them in order to categorise statistically.

*Name of the secondary school
which your child attends now* _____

Name of the student _____

Part I Your child's promotion to secondary school

This part contains four sections. Section I is about the discretionary places system. Section II is about the Centrally Allocated places system. Section III is about the appeal mechanism. Section IV is about your level of satisfaction with the secondary school your child attends now.

Section I Discretionary places system

All the questions below are about the discretionary places system and the school you choose through the discretionary places system

1.1. Did you apply for any school through the Discretionary Places System last year? (Please tick the appropriate box)

Yes (go to the next question.)

No (go to Section II.)

1.2. Please name the secondary school which you applied for in The Discretionary Places System:

_____ School.

1.3.a. Was that school inside your local school net? (Please tick the appropriate box)

Yes, it was inside.

No, it was outside.

1.3.b. Was that school belongs to... (please tick the appropriate box)

Band I

Band II

Band III

Not clear

1.3.c. Was the application a success? (Please tick the appropriate box)

Yes.

No.

1.4. Why did you want your child to go to that secondary school?

1.5. A number of factors have been suggested as important when choosing a school. Please identify the five most important factors for your choice and write the level of importance (please write 1 for the most important,...etc) of the following factors in choosing the school through the Discretionary Places System.

Factors	Please tick the five most important factors here	And rank from 1 to 5 (1 is the most important) here
1.Proximity		
2.Ease of access/travel		
3.Advice from primary school teacher		
4.Advice from friends		
5.Advice from other family member		
6.Nice environment		
7.Religious affiliation of the school		
8.Good social environment		
9.Co-education (mixed-sex schooling)		
10.Single-sex schooling		
11.Good discipline (school ethos)		
12.School tradition		
13.Band of the school		
14.Good Education Good teaching staff and principal		
15.Good teaching staff and principal		
16 Good reputation for a particular subject (e.g. sport, music...etc).		
17.Wide subject choice is available		
18.English as medium of instruction (English School)		
19.Wide range of extra-curriculum activities.		
20.Well-equipped/good facilities		
21.Good public examination results		
22.Better career prospects		
23.High rate of entry to Universities		
24.Sibling in the school		
25.Friends in the school		
26.Relatives in the school		
27.Because it is popular		
28.Other factors (please specify here)		

1.6. Were you happy with the result? ((Please tick the appropriate box and explain)

Yes,

No,

1.7.a. Do you know the school criteria for selecting students? (Please tick the appropriate box)

Yes,

No,

17.b. If yes, what are the reasons:

1.7.c. If yes, how did you find out the criteria for selecting students?

1.8. Do you think the selection criteria of the school are fair? ((Please tick the appropriate box and explain)

Yes,

No,

Explain: _____

1.9. Before you applied for that secondary school, did you obtain information about that school in any of the following ways?

	Please tick the appropriate answer (s)
1. By reading the school information handout	
2. By visiting the school to see round it	
3. By talking to a teacher/head teacher at your child's primary school	
4. By talking to a teacher/head teacher at that secondary school	
5. By contacting the Education Department	
6. By talking to family and relatives	
7. By talking to other children	
8. By talking to friends or neighbours	
9. From television or radio	
10. From newspaper	
11. From the school Web-site	
12. Had no information about that school	
13. Other ways (please specify here)	

1.10. Which of the above sources of information had most influence on your choice of school?

1.11. Now, you have been through the Discretionary Places System, you would have gained knowledge and experience, would you go about things differently if you choose again? (Please tick the appropriate box and explain)

Same

Different

Explain: _____

1.12. Do you approve the increase of percentage of the Discretionary Places rose from 10% (before 2001) to 20% (in 2001) and to 30% (from 2006 onward)? (Please tick the appropriate box and explain)

Yes,

No,

Explain: _____

Yes, No,

A lot None

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Any comment on this section?

2.1. Generally, what considerations influenced your choice (ranking) in the Centrally Allocated Places System Choice Form?

2.2. A number of factors have been suggested as important when ranking possible schools in order of preference. Please identify the five most important factors for ranking and write the level of importance of the following factors in ranking your choice of preference school through the Centrally Allocated Places System.

Factors	Please tick the five most important factors here	And rank from 1 to 5 (1 is the most important) here
1.Proximity		
2.Ease of access/travel		
3.Advice from primary school teacher		
4.Advice from friends		
5.Advice from other family member		
6.Nice environment		
7.Religious affiliation of the school		
8.Good social environment		
9.Co-education (mixed-sex schooling)		
10.Single-sex schooling		
11.Good discipline (school ethos)		
12.School tradition		
13.Brand of the school		
14.Good Education Good teaching staff and principal		
15.Good teaching staff and principal		
16.Good reputation for a particular subject (e.g. sport, music...etc).		
17.Wide subject choice is available		
18.English as medium of instruction (English School)		
19.Wide range of extra-curriculum activities.		
20.Well-equipped/good facilities		
21.Good public examination results		
22.Better career prospects		
23.High rate of entry to Universities		
24.Sibling in the school		
25.Friends in the school		
26.Relatives in the school		
27.Because it is popular		
28.Other factors (please specify here)		

2.3. Before you ranked your possible schools of preference for the Centrally Allocated Places System, did you obtain information about schools in any of the following ways? Please tick the appropriate answer (s)?

	Please tick the appropriate answer (s)
1. By reading the school information handout	
2. By visiting the school to see round it	
3. By talking to a teacher/head teacher at your child's primary school	
4. By talking to a teacher/head teacher at that secondary school	
5. By contacting the Education Department	
6. By talking to family and relatives	
7. By talking to other children	
8. By talking to friends or neighbours	
9. From television or radio	
10. From newspaper	
11. From the school Web-site	
12. Had no information about that school	
13. Other ways (please specify here)	

2.4. Which of the above sources of information had most influence on your ranking of preference secondary schools?

2.5. Are you satisfied with the advice provided by your child's primary school for ranking your choice of preference secondary schools? (please tick the appropriate box and explain)

Yes,

No,

Explain:

2.6. How much involvement did your child have in the ranking of preference schools in the Centrally allocated Places System?

A lot None
1 2 3 4 5
(Please circle the appropriate number)

2.7.a. What rank did you give the secondary school your child now attends?

	Please tick
1. First choice	
2. Second choice	
3. Third choice	
4. Fourth choice	
5. Fifth choice	
6. Others (please specify here)	
7. I did not choose this school at all	

2.7.b. In which Band is the secondary school your child now attends?

In Band I In Band II In Band III Not clear

2.8. Now, you have been through the centrally allocated places system, you would have gained knowledge and experience. Now, if you were to rank schools of preference again, would you rank schools differently (please tick the appropriate box and explain)?

Yes, No,

Explain: _____

2.9. As a parent, do you think the abolition of Aptitude test in 2000 is good (please tick the appropriate answer and explain)?

Yes,

No,

Explain: _____

2.10. As a parent, do you think the Scaling system of ranking (into different bands) students is fair (please tick the appropriate answer and explain)?

Yes,

No,

Explain: _____

2.11. As a parent, do you think the reduction of five Bands into three Bands is a good development (please tick the appropriate box and explain)?

Yes,

No,

Explain: _____

2.12. If you have older children and have chosen schools for another child in the past, do you think the new system is better? (Please tick the appropriate answer and explain)?

Yes,

No,

Explain: _____

Any comment on this section? _____

Was the school allocated to your child acceptable to you or not (please tick)?

Yes, I accepted it (go to Section IV please).

No, I appealed and got another school (go to Section III, please).

No, I appealed but I didn't get another school (go to Section III, please).

No, I didn't accept it or appeal, I found my own solution (go to Section IV please).

Section III Appeal System/mechanism

All the questions below are about the appeal system/mechanism after the result announced last July:

3.1. Why did you appeal?

3.2. How did you know that you could appeal?

3.3. What was the outcome of the appeal (please tick the appropriate box)?

Success

Failure

3.4.a. Were you satisfied with the outcome of the appeal (Please tick the appropriate box and explain)?

Yes,

No,

Explain: _____

3.4.b. If failure, then what did you do (please tick the appropriate box)?

Accept the outcome of the appeal.

Find another school.

3.5. Please give your comment on the appeal system.

Any comment on this section? _____

Section IV Satisfaction with the present school

The following questions are about the school your child now attends:

4.1. The school your child now attends was the school

	Please tick the appropriate answer
1.Allocated through the Discretionary Places System	
2.Allocated through the Centrally Allocated Places System	
3.Allocated through appeal	
4.Not allocated, I found another school for my child	
5.I don't know	
6.Others (please specify here)	

2. Please fill in below the details of your child's primary school in 2000:

Name	
Inside your local (home) net? (yes or No)	
Public or private primary school	

3. According to the information from the primary school, which Band did your child belong to after the scaling by the Education Department?

	Please tick here
Band I	
Band II	
Band III	
I don't know	

4. Other siblings in the family (Please fill in the following details):

	Gender	Age
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

No other sibling

5. Housing of your family: does your family live inside your local (home) school net (please tick the appropriate box)?

Yes,

No,

6. What is your relationship to the child? (Please tick the appropriate box).

Your relationship to the child	Please tick the appropriate box
1. Mother	
2. Father	
3. Male guardian	
4. female guardian	
5. Other (please specify here)	

7. What was your age when you left school and what academic qualifications (if any) did you get from schooling?

Your age when you left school	
Academic qualifications (if any)	

8. Please give your partner's age of leaving school and academic qualifications (if any)?

Your partner's age of leaving school	
Academic qualifications (if any)	

9. Please provide your professional qualifications

Your professional qualifications	
----------------------------------	--

10. Please provide your partner's professional qualifications (if any)

Your partner's professional qualifications	
--	--

Any comment on this part? _____

Thank you very much again for taking time to fill in the questionnaire.

If you would be willing to explore these issues further and participate in an interviewed (or telephone interview),

Please give your contact details here:

Name _____ Phone number _____

Address _____

Fax number (if any) _____

E-mail address (if any) _____

(To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, please seal the questionnaire in the provided envelope before you return it to the school)

Appendix C1: Interview schedule for Parents

Main themes and questions (all the questions are designed to encourage the parent to talk about each main theme for about 10-20 minutes):

***All the information you give will be kept private and confidential**

Themes I: Quantity and quality of information

The interviewer bears in mind the focus of this section is about the kind of information the parent had and how he/she assesses the information in order to make a decision

1. Were you happy/satisfied with the advice/information given by your child's primary school? What was the advice/information you have from the primary school?
2. Did you visit any school before you made up your mind? If yes, what sort of information you were looking for during the school visit to help you make a decision? Please tell me how did the information help in choosing a school?

Probe questions:

Did you attend any open day (parent night?)

How many schools did you visit? How many school bulletins did you collect?

Did you collect any other school information apart from those within the locality?

Did the school visit make a difference in your school choice?

Themes II: Demand, supply & most important factors

Interviewer bears in mind: What were the most important factors in ranking/choosing school?

3. Please tell me about the local school net? How many schools in the local school net, and in your opinion which school(s) suit your child? Have you ever thought of applying to any other school out of your school net? (yes, no) Why?
4. Please name the school of your first choice. Why did/didn't you choose this school (one of the four case-study schools in his/her local school net) as your DP school/CA as first choice?
5. What were the most important factors in your choosing school for your child?

Themes III: Strategy/ skill and ability of choice

Did the parent have any strategy in making school choice last year? Did parent have any idea of how to examine school? Did parent have any idea of how to evaluate school? Did parent have any idea of ranking school for his/her child (sort of matching to the school)?

6. Did you have a plan in choosing school for your child? Please give details in your process of choosing? Actually, how did you rank the school? Please tell me about how you did it? How long did it take you to make a decision? Did you have any strategy in ranking the schools for your child? If yes, please explain more.

Probing: Did you find it easy/difficult to rank the schools for your child? If yes, please elaborate. Did you consider other schools before you made up your mind of your first/first-five choice(s)? How many schools did you consider? How did you select among them? Or how did you weigh them? Was it an easy or difficult to make a school choice? Please describe in detail about your choice making process. (Was the parent confident in making school choice?) Was it easy to apply for a DP place? Was it easy to fill in the DP application form? Was it easy to fill in the CA Choice Form?

7. Did other people influence your school choice? For example: friends, neighbours, your own child. (Was the parent an independent chooser or dependent chooser)

Probe questions:

Did you have any evaluation of school before choosing?

How did you evaluate a school?

Could you easily pick the right school for your child?

Did you have confidence in making a choice?

Did you feel very difficult or confused at making a choice?

Have you ever attend (pay a school visit) any meeting—to talk about how to approach a school?

Have you ever talk to the school principal about your child?

Have you ever talked to any good friend that can recommend your child to a school?

Did you negotiate with the school for a place for your child?

Did you choose independently or were you influenced by others? How?

Was opinion of friends the most important factor in making school choice?

Was proximity the most important factor in making school choice?

Was transportation fee a key factor in decision making?

Was transportation time a key factor in decision making?

Theme IV. Inclination to choice

Interviewer bears in mind that the focus of this section is about inclination to the choice of the respondent (strong or weak, eager to engage or detached from it).

Main questions on inclination to choice

8. Did you regard school choice very important to your child? Did you think that school makes a difference in his/her future opportunity in life? How? e.g. good career...etc?

9. Did you try your best to rank a school? (Check the parent's participation: why did they participate/not participate in the DP? If the parent did not accept the school place, why did he or she participate/not participate in the appeal mechanism? Was the parent self-confidence or calculative)?

10. Please describe your choice process: active or passive, eager or detached? Please elaborate. (If parent was detached, why? What were the reasons?)

Themes V: Comment and feelings related to the SSPA reforms:

Interviewer bears in mind the focus of this section is about opinion and feelings toward the changes of the SSPA

11. How did the change of the SSPA policy affect your chance of getting the school you want for your child? Did the new arrangement increase chance or decrease your chance? Was it easier to get what you want with the new SSPA? How did you feel about the changes of the SSPA?

Probe questions:

For parents who participated in the DP:

Do you think it difficult/easy to get a place?

Do you know the number of applicants to this school and the number of places available?

Do you know how the school selected the students?

Do you think there were enough places for all the applicants?

12. Please tell me your overall feeling toward the school choice making? Were you happy? Worry? Anxious?...etc. Are you happy with the new changes or are you happier with the old SSPA?

Themes VI: Satisfaction about the present school & comment on the education reforms in Hong Kong

13. Are you happy with your son/daughter's present school? Do you want to change school for your child? Please explain?
14. Please give your comment on the education reforms in Hong Kong.

The interview ended

Appendix C2: Interview schedule for School Administrators

Main themes and questions (all the questions were designed to encourage the administrator to talk about each main theme for about 10-20 minutes):

***All the information given by the administrator will be kept private and confidential**

Theme I: Background data on demand and supply

1. How was about the demand and supply in local school net? Have there been any changes in the local school net since 2001? In the local school net, how many band I school, band II schools and band III schools? According to your knowledge, are there enough places for students who live in the local school net? (Any balance in demand and supply?)

Themes II: School enrolment composition and size

2. Enrolment size and composition: How many enrolments (F.1, F.2 and F.3) in the school? What is their composition generally? Is the enrolment in terms of size and characteristics changing? If yes, what are they and why? (Decrease, increase or same). Any change geographically? Are there more students from outside local school net? Any change socially? More students from middle class or more students from working class parents? Or no change at all? Is the enrolment in terms of social characteristics changing in these few years? Do you have these records in the school? (Data: Number of students with 100% 'textbook allowance', Number of students with 50% 'textbook allowance', number of students taking private 'musical lessons' in form I, form II and form III...etc). How is the learning attitude of most of the students in school?

3. Discretionary places and selection: Does the school have DP? How many DP applications in your school each year? How many places are available for DP application? How do you select students? What are your main criteria? (For popular, over-subscribed schools)?

*Can I have a copy of the DP application Form?

Themes III: Competition and publicity

4. Publicity activities: Are there any publicity activities? If yes, what are they (open day...etc). Do you have any printed materials to help parents to know the school more and to make school choice e.g. school bulletins? Do you have any open day for primary school students? Can I have some copies of the publication materials?

5. Parents in their questionnaires mentioned about their information of school from TV, radio and newspaper. Do you have any publicity activities through TV, Radio and newspaper...etc?

6. Do you have a special committee or personnel to organise (in charge of) publicity activities? Can I talk to the person concerning these activities?

7. Do you have a special committee to organise activities to help F.1 students to adapt to secondary school life, e.g. counselling and curriculum?

Themes IV: Response to the SSPA reforms and competition

8. Specifically, are there any administrative and organisational consequences of changes that are experienced in schools in relation to the competition created by the choice policy?

9. Do you welcome these changes? Are these good for the school? What are the positive and negative consequences of these changes for the school? What is your perception of change in school in relation to competition and choice? How has the school choice policy challenged you in managing the school now? Are there any conflicts in decision making?

10. How has the new SSPA policy challenge you in managing the school now?

11. Which way do you think is beneficial to H.K., mix-ability or streaming? What is the emphasis or educational aim of the schools? Do the school select more able, bright children, or prefer mix-ability students in school? (For popular, over-subscribed school)

12. Is there any change in the quality of student intake? Is there any change in the academic aspect of students? Is there any impact of the change toward teaching?

13. What is your comment/feelings on the SSPA overall?

14. Finally, please give your professional comments on the education reforms in HK?

The interview ended

Appendix C3: Interview schedule for the two policy makers

Main themes and questions (all the questions are used to encourage him/her to talk about each main theme for about 10-20 minutes):

Theme I: Rationale of the policy (rationale of the new SSPA arrangement)

“The Government has adopted the Education Commission's reform proposals on education system in its Report published in September 2000. These include the transitional measures to reform the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System. Accordingly, changes have been made to the System as from the 2000/01 school year.”

1. Why did the commission propose this policy (for EC) in 2000? Why did the government adopt this policy in 2000 (for EMB)? What is the rationale behind the policy?
2. Would you please be more specific? What was the benefit sought from the change in DP (For example, parents can select more than one school, discretionary places can be increase from 10% to 20% and then 30%...etc)?
3. What was the benefit sought from the change in CA (i.e. the policy changed five bands into three bands)?
4. Do you think the rationale behind the policy still holds or has it been changed over time (has been shifted)?
5. What is the role of the choice policy in relation to the Education Reforms to improve the education system in H.K.?

Theme II: Equality issues of the SSPA

6. What responses are expected for parents who make school choice? Do you think all the parents can make informed choices and have the same ability in choosing theirs?
7. How parents are engaging with schools? Are there any conflicts or tensions between the two parties, I mean between schools and parents?
8. Did the government try to ensure equality of opportunities in both the DP and CA? How?

9. Do you think all the parents from all walks of lives have the same ability in choosing? Has the government got any strategy on maintaining the equality of opportunities of school choice? (e.g. parents with different financial/material, social and cultural capital).
10. Some parents in my choice questionnaires mentioned that there was no use in appeal. Do you have any comment on this?
11. What responses are expected in schools in relation to the new SSPA? Do you expect schools to compete with one another or co-operate with one another? What is the government's expectation of the choice policy on different types of schools (band I schools, band II schools, band III schools)?

Themes III: Implementation, impact and problems of the policy

12. Are there any implementation problems found with the new SSPA? What are problems found and what solutions are there? Is there any unpredicted effect of this new arrangement after its implementation in 2001? How does it turn out and why? (There were so many appeal cases. Why?)
13. Please comment on the competition issue: What impacts on schools with different bands (Band I, II, III)? Increase intake size? Decrease intake size? Changes in schools' intake social compositions?
14. Selection problems: A certain principal said schools were competing to acquire the best students. What would you comment on that principal's saying about the competition among schools? Actually, did you expect over-subscribed schools compete for better students?
15. Some principals commented that it is a very contradictory policy for the government to change 5 bands to 3 bands and at the same time encourages schools to select students. Would you comment on the principals' criticism of the policy?
16. Some principals complained about mix ability and behaviour problem in schools caused by the changing of 5 bands into 3 bands, what is your opinion on these two issues?

Themes IV: Variety, choice and competition

17. What is the rationale behind the DSS school policy? Would you encourage more schools to change to DSS schools? Some principals comment that some DSS schools can select students earlier and can even use written test, this policy raised suspicion that the

government aims to promote the DSS schools and suppress aided schools. Would you comment on this?

18. One principal commented that since DSS schools collect fee, their resources certainly are better than aided school which do not collect tuition fee. Please give your response to this comment?

19. Would you please comment: In many school nets, student population declines and therefore many schools find that they don't have enough number of enrolments while the government are still building new schools. Do you think the government lacks a long-term planning?

Themes V: Future

20. Some parents and principals are not optimistic about the reforms and its future. Please give your comment on this?

21. What will be the future plan of the government in relation to the SSPA?

The interview ended